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## SOME ASPECTS OF CULTURE CHANGE IN MODERN BENGAL \*

*By Nirmal Kumar Bose*

**I**n a previous paper, it was stated that the organization of caste still continues to play a fairly important part in the economic and social life of modern India, whether that influence is exercised in the positive or the negative direction.† In the more out of the way places, castes are still bound by reciprocal ties of mutual aid; while in places where they have lost the character of industrial or trade guild, they prevent the unimpeded passage of men from one occupation to another. Among some of the upper classes, a renewal of loyalty to the ancient social system is in evidence, even when its economic counterpart has been very nearly worn away. We shall examine in course of this paper the possible reasons for this phenomenon.

Before the present growth of population took place, and the inroads of a mechanically superior civilization had affected the social structure of India, life in this country was mainly guided by four separate institutions. These were the joint family, caste, inter-caste regional organizations like the Panchayat and the colleges of Brahmin pandits which formed the last court of appeal in regard to religious and social questions. Hindu rulers in India were entrusted with the task of administering their kingdom in such a manner as to preserve the existing order in tact. Even when India passed under the rule of the Moslems during the middle ages, the former socio-economic structure remained more or less in tact, except in places where it was deliberately and violently shaken by the religious policy of some bigoted ruler.

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† 'Caste in India' in *Man in India*, Vol. 31, Nos. 3 & 4, pp. 121-22. For figures, see Nirmal Kumar Bose: *Hindu Samajer Gadan* (in Bengali), 1949, pp. 124-34.

But when the land passed finally into the hands of the British, the economic arrangements were no longer left undisturbed. From being a manufacturing country whose produce was carried to other lands by British vessels, India was slowly converted into the position of a colonial dependent on the industries of northwestern Europe. This brought about a swift change in the social structure, in spite of the fact that the English rulers tried to leave the structure in an undisturbed condition. It will be our purpose in the present paper to study some of the effects of this change on society and culture in the State of West Bengal.

### **The Previous Condition : Towns and Villages**

In former times, Bengal like the rest of India, was a conglomeration of more or less self-sufficient regional productive units. Trade played a smaller part in economy than it does now. And so villages were generally connected with one another by means of foot-tracks. The supply of necessities like salt was effected by means of pack-animals, or occasionally by boats or bullock carts. Waterways were used more than roads for the transport of goods, and trading or manufacturing towns were usually located on river banks. There was another class of towns which grew up round a fortification or the king's court; and these were often connected by roads which carried one across mountain ranges or through stretches of jungle. As the traffic along such routes was either on foot or by means of animal-drawn vehicles, good surfaces or corrected gradients were not needed as they are now. If the inclination was too steep, the animals were changed more frequently than in a level country.

The villages, on their part, were more or less well-knit in economic as well as social matters. Whether scattered or agglomerated in pattern, they had well-marked functional zones which interlocked with one another. Every regional unit was served by a permanent set of artisans like carpenters or blacksmiths whose services were in continuous demand. But for artisans like weavers, gold and silver smiths, brass workers, painters or sculptors, the demand was casual within the small regional unit, and so some of these artisans roamed from village to village spreading their wares over a comparatively larger territory than the small self-sufficient farming village unit. At the end of the harvest season, again, temporary towns grew up in the shape of fairs or *melas*, and skilled artisans who produced very special types of articles came in touch through them with a larger circle of customers than was otherwise available. Most fairs in India enjoy a reputation of being the gathering place of special types of goods. In some, large numbers of

boats are brought for sale, in others grains and animals, in a third wooden materials needed for house-building, in a fourth ploughs of a very special quality and so forth. In this manner, the fairs served not only as places of recreation, but also gave the farmers an opportunity to make casual, but necessary purchases of goods of a more enduring quality.

Pilgrim centres attracted men from all parts of India just as the fairs did in respect of a smaller territory; and such pilgrim towns slowly became converted into manufacturing and trading centres of articles like brass or stoneware, of costly textiles, paintings or sculptures. It is not unlikely that a few of these pilgrim towns began as annual fairs, and were only later on converted into permanent settlements.

This was the slow process in which villages and towns grew up in India even without the compliment of good roads for communication. Such an economy endured as long as the population was not very heavy, and when there was still fresh land for colonization in order to relieve any undue pressure which might have developed at one particular point. What could not be accommodated in this manner seems to have been carried off, now and then, by famines or by wars, which were perhaps less destructive than famines in former times.

### **First Results of Change**

With the consolidation of British political power in India, and the encouragement of British trade and industry under its patronage, the first sign of change came about in the substitution of money in place of tradition and status as a guide to economic activity. Formerly money was used only to a limited extent. When the caste organization worked more or less perfectly and goods and services were exchanged according to some special, traditional arrangement, the little amount of currency which was used did not exercise any serious influence on the forces of production. In the new and altered circumstances, when people were encouraged to produce more for trade than for direct consumption, money began to exercise a corrosive influence upon the ancient social bonds of reciprocity. Duties which were considered to be binding were neglected, while there was a large amount of change in occupation in some sectors. There was a great deal of movement of population from the villages towards the increasing number of towns. Some migrated to find a job in the industrial establishments, while others served to run the wheels of trade and transportation. But wherever men went, the change came about so fast that new social intergrations of a stable character did not take place fast enough.

It is unfortunate that the economic transformation took place in order to serve the interests of a ruling class which did not identify itself with the inhabitants of this country, but tried to preserve its feeling of social exclusiveness or superiority by artificial means. If the transformation had come from within, it is likely that the necessary social re-integrations would have taken place. But as the power vested in a group of aliens who had neither the interest nor the imagination to visualize the changes which were being brought about as a result of their own activities, they became interested in not disturbing the social status quo in order to maintain a strict appearance of neutrality. The result achieved was to put a brake upon natural social transformation.

### **Imperfect Urbanisation**

Following the demands of Britain's growing economic power in India, railways were built, roads came into being, often to keep trade running along the railway lines; old and minor towns on the riverways were abandoned to some extent, while this brought about a slow, but extensive, movement of population from one part of the country to another. The range of the movement was of small compass, but the total volume of movement was of considerable quantity.

One of the direct results of this process has been that villages have generally started on a career of decay. The social, and sometimes even the settlement pattern, has been disturbed. Regional ties have weakened considerably, so much so, that within the shadow of the metropolis, villages have been practically converted into dormitories from where daily passengers issue every morning only to return exhausted late in the evening with hardly any energy left in order to improve their rural surroundings. The habit of looking upon life in towns as a passing phase has inhibited the growth of a truly urban mentality among its inhabitants. Most towns in India have developed, not as planned or unified structures, but from the over-development of some pre-existing village. A few of these over-grown villages have fused with one another to give rise to larger towns, and even to a metropolis. This historical accident, coupled with the fact that the town life was often dominated by a small and privileged group of alien rulers who prevented the natives from feeling that the town was their own, has resulted in the maintenance of a parochial patriotism which proves detrimental to the interests of the town taken as a whole.

### **A Backward Step**

Even within the wards, people often carry over some of the habits



and traditions acquired under rural surroundings. Many villages in India are a conglomeration of well-integrated homesteads belonging to separate families. In a condition when caste ties have become loosened, and when inter-caste regional associations of the earlier type have vanished, people seem to fall back readily upon their kinship ties in order to tide over the economic stresses of the present.

This perhaps accounts for the fact that people clean their houses at the expense of the streets or move along roads with hardly any consideration for the convenience of others. When again there is a conflict between the interest of relations and of neighbours, the latter are generally sacrificed even when justice lies on that side. When people who are unrelated become intimate friends, they often create fictitious relationships and feel more at home when they are thus able to treat one another as brother or sister, uncle or nephew. Indeed the family bond seems to have increased in importance just because other forms of association have decayed, and fresh ones based on identity of secular, economic interests have not been able to keep pace with life's needs.

As has been pointed out already, caste organizations have virtually lost their function except among the so-called 'lower castes' many of whom still retain their hereditary occupation. Among upper classes, where the disintegration on the economic level has been greatest, caste organizations devote themselves to a little amount of internal reform, passing resolutions of a very general character; or they issue journals, a fair part of which is devoted to advertisements of arranged marriages.

The inter-caste regional organizations or the colleges of Brahmin pandits have very nearly ceased to function or been forgotten altogether.

### **The Progressives**

This is however only one side of the picture. Ever since the beginning of the nineteenth century, one section of the educated classes of Bengal have set their face towards the West. They had reasons to feel that the social and economic structure handed down from the past was unequal to meet the exigencies of modern life.

When the gates of English education were voluntarily opened wide, life was flooded by the newly introduced idea of individual liberty, while the old system, which flourished upon a restriction of freedom in the interest of the commune, appeared tyrannical in nature. The older system could not evoke a natural loyalty because of its present economic bankruptcy. The result was that the mind of 'Young Bengal' was forcibly attracted towards the cult of Individualism. But naturally, this

became suspect with sections professing loyalty to the past; for, they felt that an unchecked growth of individualism not only led to a weakening of family and caste ties, but in the end was likely to encourage a kind of selfishness which would prove disastrous to all forms of social reintegration.

### The Conflict

This conflict between those who turned their face towards the East and those who turned towards the West has been going on in Bengal ever since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Sometimes one has prevailed over the other, while a variety of syntheses have also been experimented upon from time to time without giving rise to any stable result.

One of the reasons seems to lie in the fact that in rural areas the economic structure and traditions connected with caste still function in a substantial manner. Where it has lost all economic worth it still hangs on because it assures to some classes a social superiority which they find it hard to earn on grounds of personal merit.

The second reason why there is so much sentimental loyalty to the old system lies perhaps in the fact that capitalism itself has been tried and found wanting. It raised hopes which have largely been shattered through the wars which seem to be capitalism's inevitable accompaniment. And therefore those who have become disillusioned, and often tired with the stresses of modern life, look with suspicion upon the creed of individualism on which capitalism is based. And they hearken back to a newly-found romantic picture of the past, which, at least, had the virtue of not creating as large class differences as we find today, and when man's struggle against nature was largely tempered by the mutual help which was fostered by tradition under the ancient system. Men seemed to have been happier in the past in spite of the absence of modern amenities of life; while today some seem selfishly to wallow in riches while their neighbours are left free to slave for others, or die in the open streets of starvation. In this romantic revival of the past, the question of numbers and of natural resources is often lost sight of; but its main purpose has been to register a protest against the selfishness on which the successes of the present system are apparently based.

Thus the conflict between the West and the East goes on as a fight between individualism of one kind, on the one hand, and collectivism of one kind on the other, without much prospect of its resolution in the near future. The fact is that when

the progressives of modern Bengal felt that a loyalty to old values stood in the way of the modernization of life, without which the chronic problem of poverty was, according to them, not likely to be solved, they applied the axe of individualism in order to sever the sentimental roots which kept us tied to the past. And whenever there has been a renewal of loyalty towards India's ancient collectivism, as expressed either through the institution of the joint family or the caste or regional *Panchayats*, this instrument has been applied with an almost ferocious enthusiasm. The tool is still in demand, for the appointed task of the progressives is not yet complete.

### New Loyalties

But, at the same time, those who have turned their faces towards the West do not fail to recognize that mere severance of the old ties is not enough. Individuals do not live alone; and even if the old social and economic structure has to be destroyed on account of its economic inadequacy, a fresh structure must be built up in its place which should be capable of leading men safely out of the present emergencies.

This need for a new loyalty to form the basis of the new order has taken a very peculiar form in modern Bengal. A new god has come into being in the shape of the Political Party; and in whose hands the tool is supposed to be the technology which science provides us today.

Surrounded by evidences of failure of an old order, the youthful mind readily seeks refuge in a god who promises abundance, and naturally welcomes it by means of a complete sense of self-surrender. What we see before us is no more than an exaggerated rejection of the individualism which the progressives have so long used or are still using by means of their left hand, while with their right, they seek to build up a new form of collectivism which would bind together men and women if only they have the same devotion to a common political ideal. The Party crosses existing social barriers and extends its hand of friendship across the entire world. It is no wonder therefore that the Party of today evokes very nearly the same loyalty as the Church did in former times. The story of the enthusiasm of a new convert is an old one in human experience.

But one of the unfortunate results of this worship of a new form of collectivism has been that thought is often laid aside and criticism dulled, so that nothing may endanger its solidarity in a tempestuous and uncertain world. An attitude of unquestioning obedience is more in demand than a demand for more thought, more accommodation, on

the part of each party member, so that the foundation of a democratic organization may be truly laid.

This is true not only of parties associated with Left ideologies, but also of those who professedly stand for the Right. The Left has thriven upon unquestioning obedience; and the Right has followed suit, even if it has been for the sake of self-preservation. And both have thus helped to extol the divinity of the Party in place of other gods who claimed men's obedience in the past.

### **Personalities in Transition**

It is interesting to observe that this swing between exaggerated individualism on the one hand and collectivism of various types on the other has invaded the personality of men belonging even to opposite camps. Thus, a person may behave as a gross individualist when it comes to obeying some decision of his family, while when it comes to his own political party, he may exhibit a respect for collectivism which stands in surprising contrast to his behaviour in the family circle. In a similar manner, one who is intensely loyal to the interests of his family, may behave like an uncompromising individualist when it comes to the obedience of superiors in an establishment where he happens to be employed. Individuals try to balance off one exaggeration by another; and the frequency of such patterns of behaviour seems to be one phase of the transition through which we are all passing today. During a magnetic storm, the needle does not steadily point in any one direction, but flies about wildly from one distant point to its opposite, until the storm gradually passes away.

### **A Remedy**

But a way ought to be found to stabilize conditions, and prevent the present unnecessary wastage. Even the task of clearing the ground of the old need not be carried on with as much noise as when the axe of hypertrophied individualism is laid at its root. The laying of a foundation for the future need not again be through an exaggerated and uncritical worship of the Party, even if that is better than a type of individualism which leads only to anarchy.

If in every sector of life, in each little task which may confront us whether privately or publicly, whether that is connected with the breaking of the past or building of the future, we bring into operation the scientific spirit, perhaps we shall be able to reduce the large wastage of human endeavour through which we seem to be wading our way towards the future.

Whenever a problem confronts us in science, we try to gather all relevant information, take pains to verify each significant item, try to test them in terms of some working hypothesis, devise fresh experiments and thus try to arrive at a more reliable conclusion. If we apply the same method in regard to social or political questions, then much of the emotional or sentimental accompaniment with which most questions or projected solutions are generally loaded in life, can be rejected as irrelevant or harmful; and perhaps the ground prepared for a more sober, and perhaps quicker way, of solving problems than the ones which are current in contemporary life.

If such leadership is possible in India, if we are able to turn our minds away from a sentimental attachment to either the past or the future as we have created them out of our own desires and imagination, and if we are able to turn realistically towards the intensely significant moments of the immediate present, and bring to bear upon them all available experience, while keeping true to our supreme point of reference *viz.*, the freedom of the whole human family from avoidable sorrows and sufferings, then perhaps the foundation of a new culture will be laid which will prove to be the salvation of the present as well as the hope of the future.

The fields of life ploughed deep by the contrary forces operating in our social and personal lives will serve as a fit ground where a new harvest shall grow up, provided the seeds we sow are of good quality.

## THE LOST WAX PROCESS OF CASTING METALS IN MAYURBHANJ, ORISSA

*By Gautamshankar Ray*

### Introduction

THE use of native metals such as gold, copper etc. in human history is as early as 5000 B. C. But it is not known with certainty when the arts of extracting metal from the ore, preparation of alloys and the method of casting were actually invented. The method of casting molten metal into different shapes is an important technique in metal working. In prehistoric times use of a more or less permanent mould to cast a number of articles, one after another, was unknown. One of the earliest methods for casting metal objects was to make a wax-model of the article which was replaced by molten metal, this being technically known as the lost wax or *cire perdue* process. This process has practically gone out of use today ; the main reason being that in this process, a wax-model has to be prepared for each object, which takes much time and labour, than the more economical use of moulds which can be used over and over again.

Though an out-dated process, yet it survives in some nooks and corners of the world, especially in some of the tribal areas of India. It has been reported from a few villages in Mayurbhanj District in the State of Orissa, where metal workers in brass or bell-metal still follow this process in casting some of their articles. The actual procedure described in this paper was observed by the author on 15th May 1952 in the workshop of a metal worker in brass and bell-metal in a village named Sorponkha under Kuliana police station in Mayurbhanj.

### The Workers and the Articles made by Them

Sorponkha village is not a big one. Its population consists of about 42 families. Of these, there are only four, who are workers in brass and bell-metal, belonging to a Hindu caste known locally as Thetari Rana. Out of the remaining 38 families, there are 36 families consisting of the Bathuris, a Hinduised tribe practising agriculture ; 1 family of Patar, a weaver caste and 1 family of Teli caste, their occupation being the extraction of oil. Though the primary and traditional



Plate I. Brass-smith at work.



1.



JAT-PUNGI KAT

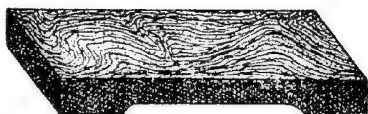


2

PUNGI



SULAT 3



4

PIRHA



SITNI 5



6

SINGTA



CHENI



7

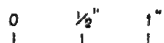


Plate II. Some of the tools.



occupation of these Thetaris is to work in brass and bell-metal, yet they also work as agricultural labourers, as they cannot maintain themselves simply by selling the products of their handicraft.

The main articles of metal which these people generally make are :

(1) Kerosene oil lamps, either in the shape as shown in the Plate VI, Fig. 2 with different kinds of decorations or in the shape of a peacock on a stand.

(2) Idols of the goddess Lakshmi, seated upon an elephant.

(3) Small money boxes in the shape of different kinds of animals and fishes.

(4) Ornaments such as bracelets, finger rings (Plate VI, Figs. 3, 5, 4), anklets etc.

#### Materials needed

The materials needed for making cores of models, models to be cast and the final objects are clay, bees' wax and brass or bell-metal.

(a) *Clay* : two kinds of clay paste are prepared for making cores of wax models and for covering the wax models; one is known as *bil* clay and the other is known as *tikra* clay. *Bil* clay is ordinary clay gathered from paddy fields, which is mixed thoroughly with cow-dung after levigation through a piece of cloth. The ratio between clay and dung is about 5 : 1. *Tikra* clay is made by well mixing soil taken from an ant hill and fine sand in the ratio of 4 : 1; and in this mixture a very small quantity of finely chopped old gunny or similar things are added in order to have good binding effect when dried. Generally, in 20 pounds of prepared *tikra* clay about 8 ounces of chopped gunny are added. Then, according to the required plasticity of the different kinds of clay pastes, the proper amount of water is added to them.

(b) *Wax* : for making wax models ordinary bees' wax either as bits or in the form of wires is used. This kind of wax can be purchased in the local market but it is an imported article from the towns. The wires are made by pressing wax in a *jat-pungi*, which is a hand press to be described later on. Before putting the wax into the press it is well kneaded with a bit of mustard oil or ground-nut oil and softened further by heating slightly. The diameter of the wax wires is about  $\frac{1}{8}$ " inch (Plate IV, Fig. 3).

In Baripada, the head quarters of the Mayurbhanj District, the author came across another group of workers in brass or bell-metal

who, instead of using wax-wires, use wires made from a sticky paste prepared by mixing the gum extracted from the *sal* tree (*Shorea robusta*) either with mustard oil or with ground-nut oil or with *kochra* oil i. e., oil extracted from fruits of the *mohua* tree (*Bassia latifolia*). The wires are made simply by the manipulation of hands and not by the use of press. The name of this caste is Thetari Naik. Bees' wax and the hand press are never used by this caste. They live in Mundakota village, roughly about 5 miles north of Sorponkha. There is no inter-marriage between the Thetari Naiks and the Thetari Ranas.

(c) *Brass or Bell-metal*: the brass or bell-metal which is required for casting is not made by these people but they re-use broken utensils of brass or bell-metal which are obtained in the local markets, either in exchange of their finished products or for cash payment. The rate of exchange between broken old object to new article is 3 : 1 with regard to weight.

### Tools and Type of Furnace Used

#### A. Tools

(1) *Dokhutia* (wooden chisel, Plate III, Fig. 4): It is a small wooden chisel, one end being a bit narrower than the other. Length  $2\frac{1}{2}$ " inches, maximum breadth  $\frac{1}{2}$ " inch, maximum thickness  $\frac{1}{4}$ " inch. Near the two ends the upper and lower surfaces gradually slope down to meet each other and form more or less sharp edges, while the lateral sides are blunt. It is generally used for engraving designs on wax models. This tool is made by the metal workers themselves.

(2) *Kaskhanda* (engraving cum planing tool; Plate III, Fig. 3): It is a piece of wood  $5\frac{3}{8}$ " inches in length with more or less rectangular cross-section. One end is thicker than the other while the maximum breadth is near the middle. Breadth of the wider end is  $\frac{3}{8}$ " inch, maximum thickness is  $\frac{3}{8}$ " inch, breadth of the narrower end is  $\frac{5}{16}$ " inch, maximum breadth being  $\frac{1}{2}$ " inch. The four edges formed by the meeting of the surfaces are more or less sharp. This is also made by the metal workers. It is generally used for engraving on clay cores and also for planing the top of the wax models.

(3) *Kulupkati* (wooden borer, Plate III, Fig. 5): It is a conical wooden borer made by the metal workers. One end is pointed and the other one is flat, while the cross-section is circular. The whole surface is smooth. Length is  $3\frac{1}{8}$ " inches, diameter of the flat end is  $\frac{3}{8}$ " inch. It is primarily used for making holes in wax models such as the



Plate III. The clay base and wooden tools.



Plate IV. Models of oil lamp and thread of beeswax.



Plate V. Finished model of oil lamp  
and the mould.



Plate VI. Final products.

hole in the wick-holder. It is also used for planing curved surfaces of wax models.

(4) *Arsipatia* (tin blade) : It is a small broken piece of a tin canister, one of its edges having been folded to make it blunt for holding purposes. Maximum length is  $1\frac{5}{8}$ " inches, maximum breadth being  $1\frac{1}{4}$ " inches. It is used for cutting wax-wires etc.

(5) *Pirha and Sitni* (wooden saddle quern, Plate II, Fig. 4 and 5) : The *pirha* is a block of wood with rectangular cross-section. Length is 19" inches, breadth is 5" inches and maximum thickness being 2" inches. The top surface is flat and smooth. From the middle of the under surface a portion has been scooped out so that the thickness at the two ends is 2" inches upto 4" inches from either side ; while the thickness of the middle portion is  $1\frac{1}{2}$ " inches.

The *sitni* is more or less a triangular block of wood with rounded edges and flat base. The base is about 6" inches in length and the maximum thickness being about 2" inches. The maximum height is about 4" inches.

*Pirha* and *sitni* are mainly used for kneading and rolling wax. These are made by the metal workers themselves.

(6) *Singta* (wooden hammer, Plate II, Fig. 6) : It is a solid cylindrical piece of wood with two flat hammer ends (length about 7" inches, diameter about 3" inches) into which a wooden handle has been inserted (length is about 13" inches and the diameter about  $1\frac{1}{2}$ " inches). It is also made by the brass workers and used for kneading clay.

(7) *Jat-pungi* (hand press for making wax wires) : It is a composite tool consisting of a pair of wooden handles (*jat-pungi kat*), a hollow brass cylinder with perforated tin covering at one end known as *pungi* and a wooden piston known as *sulat*. All these things are made by the metal workers themselves.

The *pungi* (Plate II, Fig. 2) is a hollow brass cylinder about 3" inches in length, the outer diameter being  $1\frac{3}{8}$ " inches. At one end there is an outer rim, the breadth being  $\frac{5}{8}$ " of an inch. At the other end the diameter of the mouth is about  $\frac{1}{8}$ " inch, there is an inner rim which makes the diameter of this mouth about  $1\frac{1}{8}$ " inches. A tin plate somewhat convex in nature with a number of perforations is put over this mouth from inside. The diameter of the perforation is about  $\frac{1}{16}$ " inch.

The *sulat* (Plate II, Fig. 3) is made from a cylindrical piece of wood and can be conveniently divided into two parts, the piston proper and the stem. The total length of the piston with the stem is 5" inches, the stem being 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ " inches. The diameter of the piston is 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ " inches, while the diameter of the stem is  $\frac{5}{8}$ " of an inch.

The *jat-pungi kat* or the press (plate II, Fig. 1) consists of two pieces of wood about 23" inches in length which are wider in the middle and thinner towards the ends. The surfaces near the center are almost flat with rounded edges, while the cross-section near the ends is more or less circular. The maximum width is near the middle portion, being about 3" inches, and the diameter at the edges being about 1" inch; and the thickness of the pieces is about 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ " inches. Each handle has a hole at its centre. The only difference between the two handles lies in the diameters of the two holes. The one with a diameter of 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ " inches is meant for the insertion of the hollow brass cylinder; and the other with a diameter of 1" inch is meant for the insertion of the stem of the piston only.

This composite tool is used for making wax-wires. First of all a well-kneaded lump of wax, softened by heating, is put into the cavity of the brass cylinder keeping some empty space over it. Then the cylinder is fitted into the hole of the handle with bigger diameter. The rim of the cylinder prevents it from coming out. Then the wooden piston is fitted into the hole of the brass cylinder. Over the stem of the piston, the handle with smaller hole is inserted. Then the handles are pressed together by holding them near two ends. As a result the piston is pressed against the wax and fine wires of wax come out through the perforations at the base of the brass cylinder.

(8) *Cheni* (iron chisel, Plate II, Fig. 7): It is an iron chisel purchased from the blacksmith of the local market. The length is 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ " inches, maximum breadth  $\frac{5}{8}$ " inch and excluding the head the maximum thickness is  $\frac{3}{8}$ " inch. The hammer end is blunt and somewhat knob-like, while the chisel end is sharp, the cross-section being rectangular. It is used for cutting broken old objects of brass or bell-metal into small bits which are molten for casting.

Beside the above mentioned tools, these metal workers also use factory-made ordinary iron files about 8" inches in length for filing the final products and a pair of iron tongs (Plate I, in the hand of the worker) made by local blacksmiths and used for manipulation of the heated objects. The files are purchased from the market at Baripada.

## B. Furnace

The furnace (Plate I, X mark) is a small circular hole (diameter 13" inches and depth 16" inches scooped out in the mud floor of the hut where the brassmith works, the fuel used being wood and charcoal. Air is blown into the furnace by means of a hand bellow made of goat's skin through a slant hole made in the floor, one end of it being connected with the base of the furnace while at the other end the bellow is fitted by means of a narrow bamboo pipe.

### Method of production

The entire procedure for the production of a brass oil lamp as shown in the Plate VI, Fig. 2 will now be described fully which will make clear the different stages of the lost wax process as practised by the metal workers of Sorponkha. The lamp is divided into two parts, the oil container and the wick-holder with the handle. The wick-holder can be fitted into the oil container by means of a screw arrangement. The total height of the lamp is about  $3\frac{1}{2}$ " inches and the maximum diameter of the oil container is about 3" inches.

#### A. The oil container

At first a core is made of prepared clay paste. The shape of the core is that of a flattened spheroid (Plate III, Fig. 1). The diameter at the middle is about  $2\frac{1}{2}$ " inches and the maximum thickness between the two surfaces is about  $1\frac{1}{3}$ " inches. The core is either made of *bil* clay or *tikra* clay. It is hollow, being filled inside with husks of paddy. The core is made entirely by the manipulation of the fingers. The utility of putting paddy husks inside the core, instead of preparing it entirely with clay paste will be explained later. If any engraved designs are needed on the surface of the oil lamp, then it is done on the surface of the core with the help of the kaskhanda. Generally, horizontal or transverse scored marks are made on the side of the lamps. So, according to the manufacturer's taste, either horizontal or transverse scored marks are made on the side of the core (Plate III, Fig. 2 showing transverse scored marks and Plate IV, Fig. 1 showing horizontal scored marks). Then the core is dried in the sun.

After drying, a small hole is made at the centre of any one of the two surfaces of the core and the paddy husks are taken out. Thus a hollow space is made within the core so that the clay core can easily be broken and taken out from inside of the casted metal oil lamp when required. This is the only utility of putting paddy husks within the core. Then a cylindrical piece of solid clay (length about  $1\frac{1}{4}$ " inches

and diameter about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch) made either of *bil* clay or *tikra* clay is placed over the hole of the core and pasted uniformly with it, which may be conventionally called the neck of the model. Then outside that cylindrical piece of clay, impressions of screw marks are engraved from the base upto the middle portion. It is then dried in the sun. After drying the model becomes ready to be covered by wires of wax. According to the convenience of the worker, wires of wax are placed over the clay model side by side one after another. A model partially covered with wax wires is shown in Plate IV, Fig. 2. In this manner the whole surface is covered with wires of wax. The neck is covered up to the screw marks. Then the surface of wax covering is made plain and smooth either by patting the flat surfaces by means of the *kashanda* or by rolling the *kulupkati* on the curved surfaces. If engraved or relief designs are required on the surface of an oil lamp then they are made either by engraving the wax covering or by making relief designs over the wax covering by means of wax wires. Then a rim of wax (circumference  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches, width  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch, and thickness  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch) is fixed at the base of the model and another rim of wax (width  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch and thickness  $\frac{3}{16}$  inch) is fixed round the top of the wax at the free end of the neck. Then a loop made of wax (thickness about  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch) is placed over the uncovered portion of the neck. The two ends of the loop are fixed at the two sides of the wax rim of the neck (Plate V, Fig. 1). This loop will form the passage of the molten metal when it is further covered with clay paste and the wax of whole model is removed by heating.

After finishing the wax-work, a few brass pins (small triangular bits of thin brass plate, length  $\frac{5}{16}$  inch, maximum breadth  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch) are fixed at different parts on the surface of the wax model (Plate IV, Fig. 2 showing two pins at the two sides of the upper surface). Generally 6 to 8 pins are fixed. These pins help to maintain the uniformity of the space between the core and the outer covering of clay when the wax is driven out by heating. After fixing the pins the whole model, excepting the top of the wax loop, is covered by a thin coating of prepared *bil* clay (which has been softened by the addition of water). Here *tikra* clay is not used because the *bil* clay is fine and spreads evenly over the whole surface. Over this coating of *bil* clay, prepared *tikra* clay is pasted, leaving only the top of the wax loop uncovered. The total thickness of the clay paste over the wax-work is roughly about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an inch. Then a funnel-like structure is made of *tikra* clay (height



$2\frac{1}{4}$ " inches, thickness  $\frac{1}{4}$ " of  $2\frac{1}{2}$ " inch, diameter at the mouth  $2\frac{1}{4}$ " inches, diameter at the base  $1\frac{1}{2}$ " inches), keeping a small opening about  $\frac{1}{2}$ " inch in diameter and the base. There is a slight constriction about  $\frac{3}{4}$ " of an inch above the base of the funnel. The outer diameter at the constriction is about  $1\frac{1}{4}$ " inches (Plate V, Fig. 2). This funnel-like structure is then fixed on the top of the clay covered wax model, so that the tip of the uncovered wax-loop of the model fits into the hole at the base of the clay funnel. Then the funnel is evenly pasted with the clay covering of the model (Plate V, Fig. 3). Then the model is dried in the sun. After drying, the model is heated over the furnace. As wax melts the model is turned upside down over a tumbler of water. First of all, the loop of wax melts and comes out through the opening of the funnel and thus a passage is made through which the wax of the whole structure comes out leaving a hollow space between the core and the outer covering of the clay and forms a mould keeping the impressions of all engraved and relief works of wax on the inner side of the outer covering of clay. Then the funnel of the model is filled up with small broken pieces of brass or bell-metal. After the funnel has been thus filled up, it is covered by means of *tikra* clay which is then uniformly pasted with the clay surface of the model. It is then again dried in the sun and becomes ready for firing.

First of all a few pieces of wood are burnt in the furnace and when they are converted into charcoal, the model is placed over in the furnace. The model is placed in a vertical position with the portion containing the metal piece at the lower end. The whole furnace is then covered by a broken pot at the centre of which a hole has been made. Then air is blown into the furnace by operating the hand bellows. About 30 to 40 minutes later, fumes come out through the hole of the potsherd which indicate that the pieces of metal inside the model have totally melted. Then the model is taken out and kept inverted for a few minutes so that the molten metal fills up the space which was formerly filled by the wax covering, after which it is left for cooling. When it becomes cool the outer covering is broken and the metal oil container is taken out. Then the metal loop which has taken place of the wax loop and the metal pins are removed; after that the clay neck and the core are taken out from the metal container by breaking them into small pieces. In this way a brass container of a kerosene oil lamp is made and finally its surfaces are finished by filing the surface with an iron file.

#### **B. The Wick-holder with a Handle**

A small bit of wax is taken and by rolling it on the *pirha* it is made

somewhat cylindrical, the diameter being the same size as that of the mouth of the oil container and the height being  $\frac{1}{8}$ " inch. Then by inserting this cylindrical piece of wax into the mouth of the container gradually in a rotating manner the impression of screw mark within the inner side of the mouth is taken on the outer surface of the piece of wax, which is then taken out, rotating in the opposite direction and a perforation (diameter  $\frac{3}{8}$ " inch) is made within this piece of wax by the pointed end of kulupkati. Then a conical piece of wax is made with a hole inside this piece running from one end to the other (length  $\frac{3}{4}$ " inch, diameter of the base  $\frac{7}{8}$ " inch, diameter of the hole at the mouth  $\frac{1}{8}$ " inch). Then a rim of wax ( $\frac{1}{8}$ " inch in thickness and  $\frac{1}{16}$ " inch in width) is fitted at the mouth of the conical piece of wax. After that the above two pieces are pasted together so that the base of the conical piece fits over the piece with screw impression keeping the hole open through and through from one end to the other. Then a curved wax handle (about  $2\frac{1}{2}$ " inches in length, about  $\frac{1}{8}$ " inch in thickness, the maximum width is  $\frac{3}{8}$ " inch at the one end while the other end gradually tapers to a point) is made and the wider end is attached at the middle of the wax model of the wick-holder (Plate IV, Fig. 4). After that the perforation within the wax model is sealed by means of clay. It is then first covered by *bil* clay and then by means of *tikra* clay setting by means of brass pins keeping a small opening for the molten wax to drain out and the molten metal to flow in. Generally, a number of wick-holders with handles are made at a time. A number of such models of the wick-holder with handles are covered with clay in the above manner and kept side by side one after another covering them by *tikra* clay and connecting the openings of all the models to a single opening over which a funnel-like structure of *tikra* clay, with a small hole at the base, is fitted. This funnel-like structure is like that which was made while casting the oil container. The whole model is then dried in the sun. The remaining process of taking out the wax and casting metal are the same as in the case of the oil container. After cooling the model, the whole structure of clay is broken and the holders with handles are taken out and the clay bits within the holders are pushed out and brass pins removed. Finally, their surfaces are finished by filing. Then the wick-holders are ready to be fitted to the respective oil containers. Wick-holders with the handles are also made by casting molten metal in clay moulds (Plate IV, Fig. 5) made by taking impressions of finished holders made by the lost wax process.

## A STUDY OF THE VRATA RITES OF BENGAL

By S. R. Das

### Introduction

TO the student of sociology and ethnology Bengal presents features of peculiar interest. From the earliest days of accountable history Bengal has been inhabited by people belonging to different ethnic groups and cultures. Despite differences among scholars as to the racial origin of the diverse groups of peoples namely, Proto-Australoid, Mediterranean, Mongoloid, Alpine, Nordic, etc., one thing stands clear; here in this land various races allowed themselves to be integrated into a composite whole<sup>1</sup>. Each of the racial groups that went into the making of the Bengali people had distinct cultural traits which too through long centuries of history, slowly and steadily worked out a process of a composite integrated culture that we may call by the specific name of Bengali culture. Even in historical times we have evidence of migration of people from outside Bengal and India, people who were known to belong to different racial groups<sup>2</sup>. Their blood and culture too contributed towards the making of what we call today Bengali.

Philological analysis of the Bengali language and culture has revealed that the basis of this composite people and their culture was laid mainly by the Austric-speaking people. Prof. S. K. Chatterji has a significant passage which runs as follows:

“The Austric (speaking) tribes were in the Neolithic stage of culture, and perhaps in India they learnt the use of copper and iron. They brought with them a primitive system of agriculture in which a digging stick was employed to till the hill sides. Terrace cultivation of rice on the hills and plains, cultivation of the same grain were in all likelihood introduced by them. They brought, as the names from their language would suggest, the cultivation of the coconut (*narikela*), the plantain (*kadala*), the betel-vine (*tambula*), the betel-nut (*guvaka*), probably also turmeric (*haridra*) and ginger (*sringavera*); and some vegetables like brinjal and pumpkin. They appear not to have been cattle-breeders—they had no use for milk, but they were, most probably, the first people to tame the elephant, and to domesticate the fowl. The habit of counting by twenties in some parts of Northern India appears to be a relic of an

Austro-Asiatic habit. The later Hindu method of computing time by days of the moon seems also to be Austro-Asiatic in origin.<sup>3</sup> Nor can the contributions of the Mediterranean and the Alpine groups of people be lightly set aside. The cultural traits of the people of Bengal before their contact with the Vedic Aryans have also been brilliantly summarised by Prof. Chatterji:

"The ideas of *Karma* and transmigration, the practice of *yoga*, the religious and philosophical ideas centering round the conception of divinity as Siva, Devi and Vishnu, the Hindu ritual of *pūja* as opposed to the Vedic ritual of *homa*—all these and much more in the Hindu religion and thought, would appear to be non-Aryan in origin; a great deal of Puranic and Epic myth, legend and semi-history is pre-Aryan; much of our material culture, social and other usages, e.g. the cultivation of some of our most important plants like rice and some vegetables and fruits like the tamarind and the coconut etc., the use of the betel-leaf in Hindu life and ritual, most of our popular religion, most of our folk-crafts, our distinctive Hindu dress (*dhoti* and *saree*), our marriage rituals in some parts of India with the use of vermilion and turmeric and many other things—would appear to be legacy from our pre-Aryan ancestors".<sup>4</sup>

In the earliest period of Indian history Bengal was considered as an unholy land. A land inhabited by "folks who were guilty of transgression", who were classed as '*mlechchhas*', *asuras*, *papas* and *dasyus*. A vivid description of the wild character of the people of Bengal has been given in the Jaina *Acharangasutra*, where we are told that the rudest barbarous people of the pathless Radha country set their dogs after the Jaina saint Mahavira, and the Jaina writer remarks that they liked to eat inedible food. The truth of this and similar other observations regarding the non-Aryan character of the people is also corroborated by linguistic evidence<sup>5</sup>. Sylvan Levi, after a thorough examination of the relevant languages, thinks that the primitive people of Bengal spoke a language which was neither Aryan nor Dravidian but belonged to a separate group of speech allied to the Austro<sup>6</sup>. Others suspect a strong Polynesian influence. In any case, from the Aryan point of view, the people of Eastern India were considered impure and belonging to an inferior cultural group. It was therefore enjoined that any person travelling in these eastern countries should go through a purificatory rite after his return.<sup>7</sup>

Gradually, however, migration of the so-called Aryans and their

proselytising activities ultimately led to a modification of the cultural traits of this region. But Brahmanism and Hinduism never wholly succeeded in eliminating them. There are many traits that survive till to-day. An analysis of the socio-religious rites and practices of Bengal reveals certain basic forms and ideas that are undoubtedly non-Aryan. Survival of these non-Aryan and primitive cultural traits can be best traced in the folk religious rites and rituals.

Folk literally means *jana* or *loka*, i. e. common people. The term *desi* which is commonly used even today in Bengal is derived from the term *dis*, i. e. to indicate, and hence *desa* is a region or quarter, and *desi* is local, and *desiya* is native. Folk means people, and folk religion or culture is the religion or culture of the people or *jana* i. e. in a sense, *desi* or native or local culture or religion as distinguished from the culture and religion of the high and the elite, i. e. *marga* culture or religion. An attempt has also been made in earlier and later Sanskrit literature to distinguish between local (*desi*) or native culture and the superior or *sanskṛita* or *marga* culture. Thus we have *desi* language or *bhasha* and *sanskṛita* language, *desi* or folk art and superior or *marga* art, *desi* music and *marga* music, etc. There has been a further tendency on the part of the high and the elite culture to look down upon the *desi* or native culture. There are enough evidences to prove that the so-called Aryans living in Aryavarta belonging to a superior cultural group considered those that lived beyond their pale as a barbarous people. This *desi* or folk culture is, no doubt, the culture of the people, that is to say, the culture of the non-Aryans.

In a province like Bengal where there are slight traces of the existence of primitive tribes as distinct racial groups, the folk socio-religious rites and practices are the only records of the presence and survival of non-Aryan culture. It is in folk-lore that we find an expression of genuine desires, aspirations, genius, emotions and thoughts of a people. A reconstruction of the early history and civilization of Bengal is only possible by a critical study of the folk-lore, folk-rites and practices which prevail even today in different parts of the country. They are the documents of our earliest culture of which we have no written record. Though not sanctioned in the scriptures, the folk socio-religious rites and practices are highly popular and are held in great esteem by the rural people, particularly by the women folk. These traits have, therefore, been best preserved in the socio-religious rites and practices observed by women. From time immemorial women have practised numerous

rites for the welfare of their husbands, ~~parents~~, family etc., and for the increase of ~~wealth~~ and paddy. These womens' rites and practices are the living records of the old culture and civilization of this land, which are basically non-Aryan. In the following pages an attempt has been made to find out such non-Aryan elements in the religious rites and practices observed by the women of Bengal.

A study of folk rites and practices observed by women requires, at the first instance, a thorough scientific field work. A characteristic feature of these folk rites and practices is that they are local and sometimes confined to a very limited area. A rite may be performed in a particular district without its being known to the adjacent district. Again, sometimes the same rite is observed in different parts under different names. Further, there are certain rites whose names are similar but the practices are different. They sometimes differ not only from district to district but also from sub-division to sub-division. With the gradual growth of Brahmanism and Hinduism these rites and practices have undergone numerous changes, and it is now extremely difficult to gather an idea of their basic and older forms. Besides changes in the mode of economic production and methods of life, shifting of the centre of our living from the villages and various other causes have combined to press these rites and forms into the background. In such a situation all that we get is, in most cases, only incomplete and sometimes even distorted versions. In ritual songs chanted during the observance of such rites numerous lines have been added from time to time, and often a particular ritual song of a particular rite has crept into the ritual song of another rite. It is not always very easy to sift the purer and the basic form from such confused and distorted versions. In order to do this, one has to study the socio-religious rites and practices of the primitives of our country and of other lands. There is no denying the fact that layer after layer has been deposited over these rites and practices, and the purer forms can only be found out by clearing the accretions and reaching the lowest stratum. Like an archaeologist, one has to use the literary spade to find out the earliest strata to see what lies submerged. It is only in the lowest strata that we can expect to find certain evidences of the earlier cultural traits. The earlier stages of human culture can be discovered by a study of those people that are still un-affected or least affected by the waves of later civilization, indigenous or alien. In Bengal so far as our present study is concerned, such peoples are those that have lived in the villages, away from the

high tide of passing times, but they are rooted in their fundamental patterns of living.

The high-speed wheels of modern civilization and modern way of life and education have combined to push these folk rites and practices gradually into the background and in several cases almost into disuse. Field investigations carried out in a scientific way are called for at once. Recording of each and every detail of these rites and practices has immediately to be taken up or they will soon be completely wiped out and forgotten. It is highly regretted that despite the warning which Rabindranath Tagore sounded more than half a century ago no scientific and comprehensive investigation has yet been undertaken. A very good start was made by Prof. Abanindranath Tagore who for the first time gave a scientific explanation of the *Vrata*-rites of Bengal. His analysis has been constantly referred to. Prof. D. C. Sen followed it up and placed the results of his investigation before the English reading public. During the Swadeshi days great impetus was given to the study of folk religious rites and rituals by such eminent authorities as Ramendrasundar Trivedi, Benoy Kumar Sarkar, and by the Dawn Society in general. These early studies are marked by more emotional enthusiasm than by scientific method. But they were a good beginning, which inspired scholarly and scientific studies. A number of scholars amongst whom the names of R. P. Chanda and S. C. Mitra stand pre-eminent, took up descriptive and sociological studies of our folk rites and rituals. But these studies were poor from the point of view of field investigation.

A scientific study of the folk rites and practices, as has been already pointed out, requires comprehensive field work throughout the country which is very difficult for a single individual. It pre-supposes team work with individuals working in different parts of the country for the collection of materials and observation of actual practices.

Folk religious rites and practices are too numerous to be detailed in a single volume. Of the numerous folk religious rites and rituals the *Vratas* or the vowed observances are the most important. These *Vratas* again are too many to be detailed in this short paper. I have therefore chosen to study the *Meyeli-vratas* (rites observed by women only) alone, because, it is in them that one can find the basic traits of our culture, and where the earlier and more primitive contributions to our religion have been preserved in a purer form. Of the *Meyeli-vratas* again the most important are the *Kumari-vratas*, i. e. the *Vratas* observed

by unmarried girls only. These *Vratas* persist side by side with the so-called Hindu religious rites and practices, and a critical analysis shows that their rites and rituals are basically non-Aryan and primitive. What is attempted in the present paper is an explanation of the meaning and purpose of the *Vrata*-rites, an analysis of the primitive and non-Aryan elements in these *Meyeli-vratas* which have been more or less sanctioned in hieretic brahmanical literature, and their integration with the Hindu religious rites and practices. In the next work similar attempts will be made to find out the non-Aryan elements in the *Kumari-Vratas* which have no brahmanical or Hindu Sastric sanction, and which are basically non-Aryan magical rites and rituals still persisting in the rural areas of Bengal.

### **Vrata : Meaning and Purpose**

*Vrata*, popularly called *Varta* in some parts of Bengal, is a vowed observance, a religious act of devotion and austerity. The term is also used in the sense of any rite practised or observed. To the ordinary mind, *Vrata* generally means the performance of rites or observances for the fulfilment of specific desires.

*Vrata* in the later *Samhitas* and *Brahmanas* "has the peculiar sense of the milk used by one who is living on that beverage alone as a vow or penance"<sup>8</sup>. In the *Sutra*-literature a *Vrata* has been explained as a vow<sup>9</sup>. Patanjali in his *Mahabhashya* defines *Vrata* as '*vriyate iti anena*' i. e. *Vrata* is a thing by which a choice or selection is made. While explaining and giving examples of *Vrata* he speaks of the things that are admissible as food to the Brahmanas and other *dvija*-castes. It is clear that Patanjali understood *Vrata* as *niyama* or *vinaya* or rules of conduct which presumably involved the selection or choice of what is good from what is bad. Applied to food it means the selection of what was to be taken and what not to be taken by the Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and the Vaisyas. While describing the *Vratas* he says that milk, water and such other liquids were the *Vrata* or *vinaya* of the Brahmanas, *yavagu* of the Kshatriyas and *amikshya* of the Vaisyas.<sup>10</sup>

A detailed description of a good number of *Vratas*, however, can be found in the Puranas, particularly in the *Skanda*, *Markandeya*, *Agni*, *Garuda* and *Bhavishya* Puranas. *Vrata* is defined in the *Agni* and *Garuda* Puranas as "*sastrodito hi niyamo vratam tachcha tapomatam*"<sup>11</sup>. As it regulates or controls the '*indriyas*' or the senses it is called *niyama*<sup>12</sup>. (*Vratam hi kartrisantapat tapah ityabhidhiyate. Indriyagramaniyamaniyamascha vidhiyate*). *Vrata* has been called *tapah* because in fasting



there is *santapah*. Rules of self-control which are known as *niyamas* when carried out in actual life constitute what is known as *tāpah*. The specific feature of a *tapas* is the subjugation of one's senses and such like acts. A vow taken out of a sincere contrition and repentance is technically known as *tapas*. The *niyamas* are so called from the fact of their enjoining the rules of subjugation of the senses<sup>12</sup>. Thus it follows that the Puranas understand *Vrata* in the sense of *niyama* for the purpose of *tapas*.

The Puranas classify the *Vratas* into seven different classes or groups; they are according to the *Agni Purana*, seven in number, namely, *Vaishnavi*, *Parthi*, *Bhautaki*, *Srautaki*, *Godana*, *Snatakātva* and *Paka-yajna*<sup>14</sup>. Hemadri classifies *Vratas* into two varieties, *Kayika* and *Manasika*: non-violence or *ahimsa*, *satya*, *brahmacharya* etc. are, in his view, *Manasa-vratas*, while *Kayika-vrata* consists in fasting.<sup>15</sup>

The Puranas also contain detailed descriptions of numerous injunctions that are to be strictly followed in the performance of *Vratas*, by men and women-folk alike. Such injunctions include fasting, sleeping on the bare floor, worship of the *Ishta* or *Kula-devata*, feeding of the Brahmanas, giving away of cows, gold, sandals, water-vessels, bowls, land, beds, clothes etc., taking of frequent purificatory baths, reading of the *Vedas* and performance of *homa*, abstinence from sexual intercourse and so on. Drinking water, chewing betel-nuts, sleeping in daytime etc. are not to be indulged in while fasting, and truth, kindness, charity, cleanliness, worship of the gods, performance of *homa* etc. are some of the general rules that are enjoined in all *Vratas*<sup>16</sup>. It has further been enjoined that if one is unable to observe the rite due to physical troubles, his son must do the same on his behalf; if however, the observer of the *Vrata*-rite fails due to fasting, he may take water as a drink but nothing else. Injunctions as to the conditions in which a man or woman is considered unfit to observe a *Vrata* have also been elaborately laid down, but since all such injunctions are the same as those in respect of other brahmanical rites and rituals and nothing peculiar to the *Vrata* ritual itself, they need not be detailed here<sup>17</sup>. But it is to be noted that women are not permitted to observe *Vratas* without the previous permission of their guardians. Thus *Manu* lays down:

*Nasti strinam prithak yajno na vratam napyupositam. Patim susrushate yena tena svarge mahiyate.*<sup>18</sup>

He further says that the married woman must take the permission of the husband, the unmarried of the father and the widow of her sons, before they undertake the observance of a *Vrata*.

The Puranas also dilate upon the ~~merits~~ that are derived from the observance of *Vratas*. Such merits are twofold: correct observance of *Vratas* confer *bhukti* or fulfilment of worldly desires as well as *mukti* or salvation, in other words, freedom from bondage.

This, very briefly stated, is the meaning, attitude, and purpose of *Vratas* as understood by and presented in the Puranas and followed in all socio-religious and socio-legal texts, especially in those that deal specifically with *Vratas*. Among such texts, mention may be made of *Vratakhanda* and *Chaturvargachintamani* of Hemadri (13th century A. D.), the *Vratakalpadruma* of Ratnakara, the *Vrataprakasha* of Visvanatha, the *Dayabhaga* and the *Kalaviveka* of Jimutavahana, the *Karmanusthanapaddhati* and the *Prayaschittaprakarana* of Bhatta Bhavadeva (11th to 12th century). In principle and in detail they adhere mainly to the stand taken up by the Puranas from which they derive the bulk of their materials. In the same way as in the sectarian Puranas there are large collections and entire works (*Mahatmyas*) which explain the origin of feasts and rites, so there are also similar Buddhist texts. A collection of such legends explaining the feasts and rites is *Vratavadana-mala* or garlands of *avadanas*.<sup>19</sup>

### Different types of Vratas

Numerous are the *Vrata*-rites and practices prevalent in rural India. They can be broadly divided into two groups: *sastriya* i. e. the *Vrata*-rites sanctioned by the Puranas and the other brahmanical socio-religious and socio-legal texts referred to above; and the *a-sastriya* i. e. those that have neither been sanctioned nor even mentioned by the Puranas or other brahmanical texts. The *sastriya-vratas* are well known, and since they have long found a place in our hieratic rituals they are not of much importance. The *a-sastriya-vratas* can further be divided into two: (a) those observed by women and (b) those observed by men, known locally as *Meyeli* and *Purushali Vratas* respectively. The *Meyeli Vratas* can further be subdivided into three categories: those observed by widows, (b) those observed by married women, and (c) those observed by unmarried girls. Besides, there are certain other *Vratas* which are observed both by married and unmarried women.

An explanation of these different kinds of *Vratas* may be useful. *Sastriya-vrata*-rites are those which have been described and sanctioned in the *Sastras* or the injunctions laid down by the Brahmanas. Best examples and detailed descriptions of these *Vrata*-rites are to be found

in the Purāṇas. Such rites were evolved, introduced and propagated in this country by the Brahmanas. In the *Sastriya-vrata*-rites, '*samanyakanda*' and the '*Vrata-katha*' are the two inseparable parts. First is the '*samanyakanda*' such as '*achmana*', '*svastivachana*' (uttering of *svasti* or benediction), '*karmarambha*' (commencement of the rite), '*samkalpa*', '*ghata-sthapana*' (placing of the *ghata* or jug), '*panchagavya*' (purification with the five *gavyas* namely curd, milk, ghee, cowdung and cow's urine), '*sodhana*' (purification), '*santi-mantra*' (chanting of the mantras for peace), '*samayargha*', '*asana-suddhi*' (purification of the seat), '*bhuta-suddhi*' (purification of the *bhuta*-element), gifts to the Brahmanas, '*bhujja*' or ingredients of a full meal, etc. and lastly listening to the *katha* or the story which proves the efficacy of the rite observed.

What has been said above holds good in respect of *Vratas* as understood and practised within the brahmanical system of thought and ritual; but there is a considerable number of *Vratas* which neither possess requisite characteristics described above nor have been mentioned anywhere in brahmanical literature. Such *Vrata*-rites called '*a-sastriya-vratas*' have little relation to the ethico-religious system of the Purāṇas, except in those cases where they have been slowly absorbed into the brahmanical system.

*A-sastriya-vrata* rites have no sanction in the sacred texts. These rites have been current amongst the people from indeterminable times. They are really folk rites preserving the remains of old traditions that go back to pre-historic ages. *Asastriya-vrata* rites are not merely childish and meaningless practices but they are replete with certain basic faiths and beliefs of primitive folk-life, translated into rituals that are observed for material benefits. They are observed both by men and women for wordly prosperity and for protection against all sorts of evils. Of the *asastriya-vrata* rites again those observed by women are more important and significant. Women's rites again fall into three categories as already observed: (a) those observed by the widows; (b) those by the married; (c) those by the unmarried. Rites observed by the widows alone are very few in number and do not fall in with the other two. The widows at present observe rites mainly according to the directions of the *sastras*, which have now lost their primitive folk character. They are concerned more with '*mukti*' rather than '*bhukti*' or satisfaction of wordly desires. As for example the *Ekadasi-vrata*, though very common, must, however, be observed by all widows with the object of obtaining '*mukti*' and not for the fulfilment of wordly desires.

Rites observed by the unmarried and the married, however, pay little attention to 'mukti'. They observe these rites for the fulfilment of worldly desires and for material prosperity. But most of the *Vrata*-rites observed by married women have also been incorporated in the Puranas with a brahmanical religious sanction and in such a way that it is now almost impracticable to find their non-brahmanical features. A critical analysis, however, shows that these *Vrata*-rites are a combination of 'sastriya' and 'asastriya'-*Vrata* elements. The solemnity of the rites of the early Vedic people and the simplicity and the magical properties of the real folk rites have been totally lost. The priest has been introduced and the 'samanyakanda' which embodies puranic injunctions, the 'mantra' playing the most important part. This has resulted in an elaboration of the technique of the *Vrata* and emphasis on superficialities while the real 'asastriya-vratas' are marked by naivete, directness and liveliness.

It is, however, in *Kumari-vrata* rites that we find real primitive magico-religious elements which are still prevalent in rural Bengal. A *Kumari-vrata* consists of 'aharana', i. e. collection of articles for the observance of the rite; the 'alpana' in which one finds the representations and reflections of the desires of the girls; the *Chhada* i. e. the expression of desires which are chanted during the observance of the rite; and, lastly, listening to the *Katha* which establishes the justification of the rite. There is no place for the priest or *mantra* in such observances. Here the girls gather together and observe the *Vrata*-rites for the fulfilment of their desires, which are obviously the desires of the girls who have not yet been married. They want to get themselves married to good husbands, to get sons, to have wealth of all sorts and lastly to lead a happy and prosperous life. Such simple objectives of life have always inspired primitive men to practise rites and observances, remnants of which have been left and can still be found in the rites of the *Kumari-vratas*.

In the *Kumari-vratas* i. e. in the *Vrata*-rites of the unmarried girls one can still clearly trace the rites and practices that are current among the peoples of primitive culture, rites and practices that grew out of the hard socio-economic requirements of life and that are practised for the fulfilment of their material desires. That these rites and practices are nothing but a reflection of primitive rites and practices will be evident from their close similarity and inherent affinity; indeed the ideas and aspirations governing both are the same. The *Vrata*-rites are concerned

mainly with the two fundamental instincts of human life—to live and to procreate. That is why most of the *Vrata*-rites are observed for obtaining good husbands and children. Living requires food and wealth, the desire for which finds expression in a number of rites that are frankly for ample supply of paddy, wealth, etc. The desire for water manifests itself in the rites dealing with water; therefore when they want rain, they either spray or pour down water from a *ghati* or *ghata* (earthen jug or pitcher). Like the primitive men, the observer believes that spraying or pouring water as nature does would bring about the fulfilment of her desire for water. Again, when she wants ample paddy or grain to grow, she puts grains or seeds on a *sara* (earthen bowl or plate) together with loose earth and pours water on it allowing the seeds to sprout, with which she observes the required rite. Further, when she desires to protect paddy in the field from being turned into husk or to make the field yield more crops, she observes a rite with *tush* (husk) and cowdung.

Like primitive men, the girls are not satisfied simply by doing certain things; they also express their desires in the form of speeches which are *Chhadas* uttered or chanted during the observance of the rite, and they believe that the words uttered have the power of fulfilling their desires. Like the primitives they too have their desires reflected or represented in drawings and paintings on the ground upon which or in front of which the specific rites are observed to obtain the fulfilment of their desires. Again, like the primitives, they also associate with or ascribe to nature or natural objects superhuman or supernatural elements that may bring about the fulfilment of their desires. Thus they create deities and associate them with respective rites and practices which they observe, and we have such deities as *Sandhyamani*, *Tush-tushli*, *Bhaduli*, etc. They are not certainly brahmanical gods and goddesses but rather personified nature or natural phenomena or objects in whose honour the rites and practices are performed. *Sandhyamani* is, no doubt, a deity presiding over dusk, and she is considered to be responsible for the change of the day into night. Similarly *Tush-tushli* is a deity that is considered to preside over the fertility of the field. Like the primitives again we also find girls telling tales explaining the rite and thereby proving its efficacy and helping in its propagation.

The similarity between primitive rites and the folk rites of today may be illustrated by a comparison of one of the rites of the American primitive tribes and some of our own rites. This will also explain how the primitive

minds though separated by thousands of miles act and react more or less in a similar manner. Among the American Huichol Indians when the people are faced with drought from extreme heat of the sun, they would take a clay dish and in all sides of it paint the face of the sun, and a circular space surrounded by rays of red, blue and yellow which they imagine to be his arrows or rays. On the reverse side they paint the progress of the sun through the four quarters of the sky. The journey is symbolised by a large cross-like figure with the central circle for the midway. Round the edge are beehive-shaped mounds representing hills. The red yellow that surrounds the hills are corn fields. The crosses on the hills are signs of wealth. On some of the dishes again birds and scorpions are painted and on one side slanting arrow-like lines mean rain. The dishes are deposited on the altar of the gods and left there; and then all is well. The Huichol Indians think that "the sun with his broad shield and his arrow rises in the East bringing money and wealth to the Huichols. His heat and light from his rays make the corn to grow but he is asked not to interfere with the clouds that are gathering on the hills"<sup>20</sup>. Thus he utters the thought about the sun, and he paints his prayers on the dishes. In the case of *Bhaduli-vrata*, *Senjuti-vrata*, *Tara-vrata*, etc. of Bengal we find similar manifestations and expressions of desires. In *Bhaduli-vrata*, elaborate and most complicated paintings are drawn on the ground representing boats, rivers, seas or oceans etc., and with offering of prayers to each of these, the girls sing,

"Oh river! Oh river!

Where art thou going?

Give news of my father and brother, etc".

Again in *Senjuti-vrata* we find similar representation of desires on the ground. In the *Bhaduli-vrata* the girls want to bring back their relatives by ways of land and sea, and therefore, they represent them in painting and drawing. It is interesting to note that the primitive tribes of India similarly observe their rites by drawing and painting on the ground. Obviously the unmarried girls of Bengal, like the primitives, practise sympathetic magic. Like the primitives they also feel and believe that the future event is actually present, and cause and effect get mixed up as one single unit. They thus display an ingenuity that implies an accurate observation of cause and effect relation.

Lastly it is to be noted that individual desires and individual rites

and practices cannot, however, be called pure *Vrata*-rites though they are also observed for the fulfilment of desires. A *Vrata*-rite to be specially called as such must be observed collectively by people having the same emotions and feelings. At least individual desires must have a collective basis. When a girl observes a rite for the growth of paddy or for rain, she observes it not for herself alone but the common desire of the community finds expression in the rites she observes. These *Vrata*-rites are really rites observed for collective social prosperity. They are attempts to protect the people of the community as a whole against evil, to get the best out of the changes of the seasons and to obtain the fulfilment of worldly desires. In fact, *Vrata* is the observance of uttering, representing and illustrating a strongly felt emotion or desire by representations, by making or doing or encircling the objects of acts desired.

### Antiquity of Vratas in Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical traditions

Antiquity of the *Vrata*-rites is still wrapped in obscurity. We have practically no literary or historical evidence to trace a continuous story of the *Vrata*-rites and practices. Since these *Vrata*-rites are nothing but primitive magico-religious rites they do not find any mention in our ancient sacred lore or hieratic brahmanical literature. However, we have references to primitive rites and practices which were in course of time, brahmanised or hinduised and also to those which were introduced by the Brahmanas. But the face and the character of these integrated rites have been so diversely and incongruously changed that we can no longer recognise them as primitive rites. The Vedic hymns were chanted and prayers were made in the very same way as the *Chhadas* are chanted in the *Vrata*-rites but there is hardly any trace in them of the observance of any *Vrata*-rite and practice. The Vedic Aryans prayed to Indra for giving them rain but they did not certainly act accordingly by spraying or by pouring down water to cause rain. They were satisfied by intimating their desires to the deities concerned. But the *Atharva-veda* which is the best documentary account of non-Aryan and Aryan acculturation describes many rites and practices that must have been borrowed from non-Aryan sources. This is presumably one of the reasons why the *Atharva-veda* is not considered as a *Veda* at all. Rites performed by women called '*strikarmani*' have been treated elaborately in the *Atharva-veda*. "The eventful life of a woman before, during and after marriage has given rise to practices and charms which are naturally ignored by the main current of vedic tradition; the *Srauta*-literatures are but fitly

embodied in the *Atharvan* and *Grihya-sutras*." The *Grihya*-rites are restricted to more pious and orderly aspects of the daily life of the vedic Aryans. They deal with rites and practices which are of a regular, permanent or periodic character (*nityakarmi*). The *Atharva-veda*, on the other hand, deals primarily with occasional and optional practices (*naimittika karmya*) which are again primarily non-Aryan in character. In the *Atharva-veda*, house, home, field, river, grain, rain, cattle, trading, gambling, journey, returning, serpents, vermins, etc. furnish special theme for prayers and charms. Charms to increase and protect crops, charms to secure prosperity of the cattle, prayers in planting trees, charms to secure love, etc. are the special features of the *Atharva-vedic* hymns. But a considerable number of hymns are devoted to the relation of the two sexes: love charms, charms to obtain a husband (*Pativedanani*), etc. It is interesting to note that the *Vrata*-rites also deal primarily with such themes. Indeed, there are numerous similarities between the *Atharva* vedic charms and prayers and the *Vrata-chhadas*. It has been contended that the charms and the practices of the *Atharva-veda* are preeminently rooted in an even earlier antiquity; and it seems quite probable that the *Atharva-vedic* rites and charms were mostly derived from the non-vedic people of the country. It is also to be noted that like the *Vrata*-rites the *Atharva* and the *Grihya* rituals as described in the *Grihyasutras* are essentially magical. Such rituals and ceremonies are considered to be sufficient for achieving objects even without the agency of gods<sup>21</sup>. There is a reference to a *Vrata* called '*Mahavrata*' which shows many interesting features of folk festivals, such as the dancing of women in a ring round the fire with water pitchers<sup>22</sup>. Even the great rites *Rajasuya*, *Vajapeya* and *Asvamedha* were all in origin popular festivals of political significance. In the periods of the Epics and the *Dharmasastras* further acculturation took place but we have hardly any evidence of the observance of the *Vrata* of the types described above. In later brahmanical accounts we often get references to the observances of folk religious rites and practices but they were, however, always discouraged. It has been enjoined upon the king not to interfere with the local customs and not to allow unrighteous practices. Thus Kautilya in his *Arthashastra* says,

'*Charitramakritam dharmyam kritam chanyaih pravartayet,  
Pravartayenna chadharmyam kritam chanyair nivartayet*'.

righteous and practised by others are not observed in his own country and "He should initiate the observance of all those customs which though



give no room for the practice of whatever is unrighteous, though observed by others"<sup>23</sup>. Here the king is advised not to allow unrighteous practice. This was the policy of the state as recommended by an astute politician like Kautilya. It is not unlikely that by *unrighteous* Kautilya probably means those practices which have no brahmanical sanction but which are practised by the people in general. Though Kautilya does not believe in the idea of allowing the continuance of unrighteous practices, he describes in his book various magico-religious rites and practices which were observed by the people but which had no brahmanical sanction. Besides the mention of numerous deities, we also find reference to the propitiation of demons, ghosts, animals, etc. for warding off of dangers and mischiefs. Belief in supernatural power is proved by the reference to the faith of the public in the power of the *tapas*, etc. It seems that Kautilya himself was a believer in the efficacy of prayers and spells. We have numerous references to the incantations and prayers for causing rain and the ceremony of *Mahakacchapa-vardhanam*. Besides, numerous other practices were observed to bring forth wealth and riches, to cause the birth of a son, to induce a woman to love, etc.; indeed Book XIV is practically devoted to the description of various secret means and contrivances<sup>24</sup>. Belief in the influence of the stars seems to have had a firm hold on the popular mind and in the chapter on *Sitadhyaksha* we are told of the influence of stars on the growth of corns. Besides, faith in mysticism and magical practices was also very common. Even in Kautilya's days popular rites and practices, magical and semi-magical, continued as usual, and their popularity amongst the common people is shown by the constant references to the employment of the *Atharva-vedin* priests, which is by itself significant, for the performance of such rites.

Even in the days of Asoka (3rd century B. C.) we find references in his inscriptions to the popular rites and practices observed specially by women. Asoka, however, does not encourage such rites and practices. He prefers '*dhamma-mangala*' to '*uchavachamangala*'. Thus in R. E. IX Asoka says, "people perform various (lucky) rites in sickness, at marriage, at the birth of offspring and on journey. On these and other similar occasions people perform various rites. In matter, however, womankind performs much manifold trivial useless rites. Rites should undoubtedly be performed. But rites of this kind bear little fruit. That rite, however, bears great fruit which is '*dhamma-mangala*'"<sup>25</sup>. What are these useless and trivial rites performed

by women? In the *Jatakas* and early Buddhist literature we have references to such rites and practices. Thus we have,

*Akankhamana puttaphalam devaya namassati,*

*Nakkhattani cha pucchchhati utusamvachchharani cha.*

"The rites or ceremonies were performed or observed at the time of illness, at the marriage of sons and daughters, at the birth of children or for the advent of offspring, and in setting out of a journey to distant places. Specially the womenfolk are said to have performed many and diverse rites that were minor and meaningless" <sup>26</sup>. The rites and practices observed by women referred to here certainly included rites and observances which had no sanction in the brahmanical *Sastras* and which Asoka did not like and therefore openly condemned. We do not know how far Asoka succeeded in his attempt at discouraging these non-brahmanical and non-Buddhist rites and practices. There is, however, no denying the fact that the observances of these rites continued as usual without any change at least up to the Gupta period.

The Gupta culture-period (from c. 4th. century A. D. to c. 7th. century A. D.) witnessed not only a revival of Brahmanism but also what was indeed a renaissance in Brahmanism. It is in this period that the Puranic Hinduism took its final shape assimilating within its fold diverse socio-religious rites and practices which had so long no brahmanical sanction. It is during this period that the major Puranas were composed, and they most successfully absorbed and integrated many non-Aryan elements. A large number of popular rites and practices including certain *Vratas* were given new interpretations and eventually incorporated into the brahmanical system <sup>27</sup>. This explains elaborate references to *Vrata*-rites that are to be observed on different occasions. They recommend performance of the *Vrata*-rites almost on each day of the month. They also particularly recommend charity on the days of eclipses, *Samkranti*, equinoxes, etc. Best evidences of such '*dana-dharma*' or the merits of gifts are to be found in the land-grant inscriptions issued from the 5th century A. D. onwards. The Puranas also declare certain days and *tithis* as particularly auspicious for making gifts and observing *Vrata*-rites such as *Ratha-saptami*, *Purnima-mahavaruni*, *Kapila-shashthi*, *Ekadasi*, etc. A number of land-grants were also made on the *Dasami*, *Ekadasi*, *Dvadasi* and *Purnima* days <sup>28</sup>. The *Vrata*-rites referred to in the Puranas and in the classical Sanskrit works are too many to be mentioned here in detail. It will, however, be quite enough to note that all the *Vrata*-rites

mentioned in the Puranas are not purely brahmanical or Hindu rites. They are, on the other hand, mostly non-brahmanical or non-Aryan rites incorporated in the Puranas. Even some of the *Meyeli-Vratas* have been included and given a brahmanical sanction and garb.

But the Puranas failed to absorb wholly the *Kumari-Vratas* which are observed even to this day in different parts of rural India but without any brahmanical religious sanction whatsoever. Still it would be wrong to assert that Hinduism or Brahmanism completely failed to exercise influence on these *Vrata*-rites. On the other hand proselytising activity of Hinduism and its wonderful power of absorption and assimilation succeeded in introducing brahmanical elements into these *Vrata*-rites. Even post-Puranic brahmanical sects of different faiths and ideologies like Vaishnavas, Saivas, etc. affected these *Vrata*-rites to a great extent. This explains the introduction of Vaishnava and Saiva deities and their rites and practices even into the *Kumari-Vratas*. Despite all these the *Kumari-Vrata* rites succeeded to a great extent in preserving a separate non-brahmanical and non-Hindu entity. A critical analysis and examination of those *Vratas* reveal their true character which remains basically non-Aryan. Not to speak of the *Kumari-Vratas* which are not even mentioned in the Puranas, a critical analysis of numerous other *Vrata*-rites, particularly those of the *Meyeli-Vrata* group which find sanction in the Puranas, reveals that they were originally non-Aryan *Vratas* which the Brahmanas interpreted and remodelled in their own way to suit their own purpose. Besides, they also introduced a number of new *Vrata*-rites in imitation of the *Vrata*-rites prevalent among the common people, and accordingly laid down numerous rules and injunctions to be followed in the course of the observance of those rites.

#### Non-Aryan traits in Brahmanical Vratas

It would therefore be profitable to trace non-Aryan elements in those *Vrata*-rites and practices which have been long absorbed and integrated by Brahmanism and which are still observed by women in different parts of Bengal. An attempt will also be made to see how the Brahmanas introduced new rites and how they absorbed those rites which they had once considered unrighteous.

#### Lakshmi-puja-vrata

Let us take the example of *Lakshmi-puja-vrata* which is the national festival of the women of Bengal. This *Vrata* is observed usually thrice in the year, once in the month of *Phalguna* (Feb-March) before sowing seeds, again in *Asvina* or *Kartika* (Sept.-Oct or Nov.) when the

plants cover the field i. e. the so-called *Kojagari-purnima* and for a third time in the month of *Agrahayana* (Nov.-Dec.) when paddy is reaped and brought home. This *Vrata* is also observed in the months of *Bhadra* (Aug.-Sept.), *Kartika* (Oct.-Nov.) and *Chaitra* (March-April). In Orissa the month set apart for her worship is *Agrahayana* (locally called in Bengal and Orissa, *Aghran*). The rite is performed not by a priest but by the oldest female member of the group or family<sup>29</sup>. In Orissa the *Lakshmi-puja*-rite is commonly called '*Lakshmi-osa*'. The observance of the rite clearly shows that it is mainly the worship of crop and hence also of fertility<sup>30</sup>. We have also another *Lakshmi-puja* in Orissa called '*Manabasa Gurubara*' (*Guru bar* is Thursday) which is observed on Thursday in the month of *Magha* (Jan.-Feb.) In this rite *Lakshmi* is worshipped and invoked in the "shape of a *mana* (a small cane-made grain-measure) of new paddy". This worship is repeated on every Thursday of this month<sup>31</sup>. There is still another *Lakshmi-puja-vrata* in Orissa known as *Sudasa-vrata* (*Su* means good, auspicious; and *dasa* means fortune or number ten). This rite is observed on the 10th *tithi* of the bright fortnight which occurs on the Thursday of any month. It is believed that the proper observance of the rite will expel misery and bring forth prosperity, happiness and comfort<sup>32</sup>. In Bengal on every Thursday (which is associated with *Lakshmi* and commonly called *Lakshmi-bar*) *Lakshmi* is worshipped with the offerings of flowers and food, and the rite is rounded off by the recitation of the *Vrata-katha*. As *Lakshmi* is considered to be the goddess of plenty and wealth so she is the house-deity, and a separate *asana* (seat) with the image of *Lakshmi* is kept apart in the main room to which lamp and offerings consisting of flowers and articles of food are offered every morning and evening.

Of all *Lakshmi-puja* observances, however, the one observed in the month of *Asvina* or *Kartika* on the *purnima*-day (full-moon day) immediately following the *Durga-puja* has the character of a national festival of the women-folk of Bengal. They engage themselves for the whole day in painting various sorts of *Alpana* on the ground representing worldly requirements, paddy, paddy-plants and other sorts of wealth. On a *chauki* (wooden seat) is placed a *dala*, basket made of cane or bamboo pieces and a *vida* (a circular ring made of grass and fibre) in which is placed the tooth of a boar. *Naivedya* (offering), *rachana-patil* (a terra-cotta earthen pot with fried rice), etc. are placed nearby. *Lakshmi-sara* (terra-cotta painted earthen plate) is then placed on the *chauki*, and above or below the *Lakshmi-sara* is placed half of a cocount which is called *Kuvera's head*. In the district of Jessore

and some parts of Faridpur one *dab-narikela* (green coconut) dressed like a girl and a boat made of plantain-bark are placed on the side of the *chauki*. On the boat are placed small grain bin made of plantain sheaths with different kinds of grain in them. Again in most parts of Faridpur a plantain tree is dressed with a new *sari* as a new wife and is made to stand behind the *chauki* where the *Lakshmi-sara* is placed.

*Lakshmi* is not found mentioned in the *Rigveda* in the sense the term bears in later mythology which describes her as a deity personifying good fortune and good luck as well as a goddess of wealth.<sup>32a</sup> In the pre-vedic literature we often find mention of the name of *Lakshmi* and her worship. In the *Atharva-veda* we have a hymn which describes the characteristics of *Lakshmi*. It is highly interesting to quote here the hymn which closely resembles the description of the popular deity and the rites observed:—

“*Pra patetah papi Lakshmi nasyetah pramutah pata. Avasmayena ankena dvishate tva sajamasiya ma Lakshmi patayalur ajushthabhichas-kanda vandanave vriksham Anyatrasmat savitastamito dhah hiranyahasto vasu noraranah. Ekasatam Lakshmyo martyasya sakam tanva janushodhi jatah. Tasampapistah niritah pra hinmah sivah asmahyam jatavedo ni yachhha. Eatah enavyakaram khile gah vishitah iva Ramantam punyah Lakshmir yah papistah aninasam.*” (VII. 115.).

“Fly away hence, O unlucky *Lakshmi*, perish hence, fly away from thence; with an iron hook we fasten thee to our enemy *Savitri*, do thou who art golden-handed, bestow on us wealth; Send away from us to some other, mount me up as a creeper upon a tree. A hundred *Lakshmis* are born together with the body of a mortal at his birth of these. We chase away hence the most unlucky. Do thou *Jatadevas* retain for us those which are fortunate. May these *Lakshmis* which are auspicious rest here. Those which are unlucky I destroy”<sup>33</sup>.

From this hymn it follows that there were two *Lakshmis*, one lucky and auspicious and the other unlucky and inauspicious. We shall see presently that even to-day in Bengal the inauspicious *Lakshmi* is worshipped in the name of ‘*Kojagari-Lakshmi*’. We shall also try to show that *Lakshmi* was originally a non-Aryan primitive deity. When at a later date the Brahmanas accepted her within their fold, they stigmatised the old non-Aryan *Lakshmi* as *a-Lakshmi* or inauspicious *Lakshmi*, and conceived the *Lakshmi* of their adoption as a benevolent goddess. They therefore prescribed that before the worship of *Lakshmi*, *a-Lakshmi* must be driven away, but incorporated most of the rites and practices of the non-Aryan primitive *Lakshmi*.

A critical analysis of the rites and practices observed during the *Lakshmi-puja* reveals that a number of non-Aryan elements, such as the boar's tooth, Kuvera's head, coconut or the plantain-tree dressed as a bride, owl, paddy-plants, etc. have crept into the *Lakshmi-puja* of our days. All these non-Aryan elements have been accepted by Hinduism. Boar has been sanctified in Hinduism by the introduction of '*Varaha-avatara*' in the Puranas. Skulls have become a favourite of Siva through the Puranas and the Tantras. Paddy-plants have been identified with *Lakshmi* herself. That which was a seasonal and agricultural rite was thus transformed into hieratic brahmanical rite that has close parallels in similar rites observed in native America and other places<sup>34</sup>. It would be very interesting in this connection to refer to the description of the Corn-goddess in Mexico and Peru<sup>35</sup>.

There are some similarities between the observances of Mexico and Peru and our *Lakshmi-puja*. In the primitive observances of Mexico and Peru human sacrifice and the offering of the heart of the victim constituted two important elements while in our *puja* we find the offering of a part of coconut as the skull of Kuvera. The victim of the rite is a woman; in our observance the coconut dressed as a lady with vermilion, turmeric, etc. or the plantain-plant-bride seems to represent the victim. Besides, that it was a pure sympathetic magical rite is proved by the offering of the plantain-fibre-boat containing grains, gold, silver, etc. By observing a rite with these ingredients women desire to have boats loaded with grains and paddy which would enrich the house, and the inmates of the family will be able to fetch more paddy and wealth by trade and commerce. The *plantain-plant-lady* which is also worshipped (in some parts of Eastern Bengal) during the *Durga-puja* is no other than the *Vana-Durga* or the Durga of the forest who was originally a primitive deity, and when the rite at a later date was hinduised, she was given a place at one corner of the *puja-mandapa*. Here also we find the presence of *Vana-Durga* who is again a deity par excellence of corn, fertility and wealth.

That the *Lakshmi-puja* was originally a primitive agricultural rite and was later absorbed into Hinduism is also proved by the fact that even now-a-days before the actual *Lakshmi* is worshipped in the house, another *puja* is held just outside the house which is locally known as *a-Lakshmi-puja* or *a-Lakshmi-vidaya* which is referred to in the passage from the *Atharva-veda* already quoted. *A-Lakshmi* is first worshipped by the priest outside the house after which *Lakshmi* is worshipped in

side. Women do not take part in the *a-Lakshmi puja* which is performed either by a Brahmana priest or by the younger boys. Who is this *a-Lakshmi*? She is no other than the non-Aryan Corn-goddess. When the Brahmanas introduced the new rite and asked the people to observe it women being naturally conservative might have refused to give up their old rite. A compromise seem to have been effected by which it was settled that the old *Lakshmi* could be worshipped only outside the house and then thrown away. The Brahmanas presumably were eager to show that their *Lakshmi* was the real *Lakshmi* while *Lakshmi* whom the people so long worshipped was an inauspicious *Lakshmi* and hence should be driven out. Still at a later date women, no doubt, accepted the Brahmanical *Lakshmi* but refused eventually to participate in the observance of the rite in honour of *a-Lakshmi* as they did not like to incur the anger of the real *Lakshmi*. The Brahmanas certainly had a hand in this sort of teaching. That is why the priest worships her outside the house, and the boys drive her out by saying,

“*A-Lakshmi vidaya hoy,  
Lakshmi ase ghare.*”

“Out with *a-Lakshmi* and let *Lakshmi* enter the house.” We have already referred to a hymn in the *Atharva-veda* which similarly drives away *a-Lakshmi* or inauspicious *Lakshmi* but welcomes *Lakshmi* or the auspicious one. In the district of Monghyr (Bihar) on the *Bhuta-chaturdasi*-day the Hindus make an image of cowdung representing *a-Lakshmi* and drag her out and humiliate her in the following words:—

‘*Lachmi ghar dariddar (i. e. a-Lakshmi) bahar*’

In some parts of Bengal on the night of *Kali-puja* *a-Lakshmi* is often worshipped by the house-holders, and they drive her out before *Lakshmi* is installed in the house. This worship of *a-Lakshmi* on the *Kali-puja* day is very significant. The *Markandeya-purana* states that *Kau* is ‘*gupta-rupe-devi*’. The *Devi* who is manifested takes three forms, *Lakshmi*, *Maha-kali* and *Saraswati*. As bestower she is *Lakshmi* and as destroyer of wealth and property she is *a-Lakshmi*.

Further on the plantain-bark-boat three figures of yellow, red and green colours are placed. They are called *Lakshmi*, *Kuvera* and *Narayana*. These were originally three primitive deities similar to the protectors of corn worshipped<sup>56</sup> in Mexico. Again, this boat with figures and plucked hair are given away while driving out *a-Lakshmi*.

Here it will not be out of place to refer to another *Vrata* which

resembles to a great extent the *Lakshmi-puja-vrata*. This is commonly known in Bengal as '*Garsi-vrata*' (*Garhasthya-vrata* or *Garu-vrata*; *Garu-ghar*) which is observed for the benefit not only of the household but also of the cattle. This *Vrata* is observed in different ways in different parts of Bengal, irrespective of caste, on the *Sankranti*-day of the month of *Asvina*, generally in the early morning before sun-rise. In some parts (Jessore, Khulna and Nadia districts) women and boys get up from bed before dawn and light a fire with jute-fibre and sticks and sit round it; then they apply *ghee* and turmeric to their lips for preventing cracking during the winter season. In Vikrampur and other parts of Dacca the people get up from bed early in the morning and light a fire with jute-sticks with which they go round the houses of the village, saying all the time.

"Out ye vermin (leeches and worms)

Come *Lakshmi* into the house."

In the district of Nadia a winnowing fan is beaten with a bunch of jute-sticks, and a spell is uttered by which *Lakshmi* is invited to enter into the house. In the district of Faridpur during the *Kartik-puja-vrata* the boys at dusk light a bundle of jute-sticks and move round the house, and as they do so, they beat a winnowing fan with a view to driving away worms and fleas which are troublesome during the winter season. Indeed this beating of the winnowing fan with sticks is a sort of magical rite to ward off worms and fleas. In fact they practise magic by putting living fleas, mosquitos, etc in the bundle of burning jute-sticks. But in the *Garsi-vrata* of Faridpur no such rite is practised. In certain localities the main feature of the *Vrata* is the disfiguration of an earthen image of *a-Lakshmi* with nose and ears chopped off, and then *Lakshmi* is installed in the house. In some parts again (districts of Barisal and Faridpur) the *Katha* (tale) of *Lakshmi-vrata* is narrated, and the boys and girls are asked to read their books, since it is believed that reading in the early morning of that particular day makes one most intelligent. In other parts the *Purahita* (Brahmana-priest) comes and worships *Lakshmi* and offerings consisting of *Khesari-dal* (*Lathyrus sativus*), *Kumda* (gourd), *tala* (*Borassus flabellifer*), *boro-rice*, etc. are made. No produce of the plough-share is to be offered. In the district of Faridpur and other places the boys and girls light jute-sticks and smoke them like cigarettes which, they believe, would enable them to protect their lips from cracking and also the throat from irritation. In Vikrampur and Faridpur it is further believed that unless they eat *saluka* (*Nymphaea lotus*) and *Khesari-dal*, *a-Lakshmi* will enter into the house. Boys are not, however,



allowed to eat the offerings of the *Garsi-vrata* since it is believed that it will make them dull. In the district of Mymensingh this observance is regarded as a worship of *Lakshmi*, and at the same time a sort of worship is made to the dead mother-in-law. The performance of the *Garsi-vrata* of the district of Mymensingh is, however, a reminiscent of earlier worship of the Mother-goddess.<sup>37</sup>

The common feature of the *Garsi-vrata* and the *Lakshmi-puja-vrata* is the expulsion of *a-Lakshmi*. This driving away of *a-Lakshmi* and the installation of *Lakshmi* in the house is similar to the rite of the human scape-goat in ancient Greece, otherwise called 'expulsion of hunger', when the slave was beaten with rods and turned out of doors with the words.

"Out with hunger and in with wealth and health".<sup>38</sup>

This is almost similar to the driving away of *a-Lakshmi* from the door and thereby inviting *Lakshmi*, the goddess of wealth and prosperity.

It appears that the Brahmanas created a new *Lakshmi* to replace the old *Lakshmi* or the Corn-goddess worshipped by the non-Aryans. But they could not altogether forsake her, presumably due to the vigorous protest from the people. That they tried their best to make an adjustment becomes clear from the puranic stories invented to explain the origin of *Lakshmi* and *a-Lakshmi*. These stories give a vivid picture of the brahmanical attitude towards the non-brahmanical deities. In the *Padmottarakhandā* it is related that when the ocean was churned the gods bestowed *Lakshmi* to Vishnu. But *Lakshmi* said, "How can the younger sister be wedded when the elder remains unmarried? First marry my elder sister *a-Lakshmi* and then marry me. This is the usual law." Vishnu then married *a-Lakshmi* but got rid of her by bestowing her on *Vadālaka-muni*. It is said that she had "thick lips without face, deformed body, unkempt hair and blood-stained eyes." This *a-Lakshmi* could not stand the chanting of vedic hymns and flames of the *homa* and wanted to leave. She then went away and took her resort on a tree and began to cry aloud. Her younger sister took pity on her and appeared there along with her husband to console her. Vishnu said, "Oh, *a-Lakshmi*! this *asvathva*-tree (*Ficus religiosa*) has sprang up from a portion of mine, so dwell thou here forever. *Lakshmi* shall visit thee on Saturdays". According to the *Vishnu purāṇa*, however, when the ocean was churned, first came out *kalakuta-visha* (poison) and *Jyeshtha* (the elder one) who could not tolerate the presence of Vishnu and Siva. She was married to a Brahmana named *Dusata* who was advised by *Markan-*

deya to take her to all places where inauspicious rites were practised. She was later deserted by her husband who warned her not to enter into people's houses but assured her that women would worship her. Ever since she had been living generally outside the inhabited villages. This *Jyeshtha* has been described as the elder sister of *Lakshmi*. *Jyeshtha-devi* and her origin are well known<sup>39</sup>. These stories reveal the reasons why she is still worshipped in Bengal outside the house and then driven away. It becomes apparent also that she was an earlier deity. The Brahmanas in spite of their diverse attempts to replace the deity by a new one could not afford to ignore her altogether. In Sanskrit literature she is described as "the goddess with two arms and two eyes with big cheeks, large pendulous breasts descending as far as navel, a flabby belly, thick thighs, raised nose, hanging lower lips and in colour as dark as ink" ..... This description fairly tallies with the conception about the non-Aryans. We have already seen that in Bengal, a rude shapeless figure of cowdung represents *a-Lakshmi* and after the performance of some rites she is dragged out and thrown away. Though neglected the Brahmanas could not altogether get rid of her. "Even to-day in many temples, though unworshipped, she is simply given a corner, in many others her image is pulled out of the seat and thrown away".

She has been elaborately mentioned in Sanskrit literature, and a whole chapter has been devoted to her by Baudhayana in his *Grihyasutra*. Stone images of her are available particularly in Southern India. She is one of the eight forms representing *tattvas* of *Parasakti* i.e. *jalamayi* representing *sthit*. In old Tamil literature the name of *Jyeshtha* has been given as *Mugdi*, *Tanvai*, *Kaladi*, *Kettai*, etc. Her weapon has been described to be a sweeping broom which is the same as that of the goddess *Sitala* in Bengal<sup>40</sup>.

That *a-Lakshmi* was the old non-Aryan *Lakshmi* or goddess of wealth and that *Lakshmi* was a later introduction by the Brahmanas becomes apparent from the *Vrata-story* (*Katha*) which is narrated even to-day after the completion of *Vrata-rite*. The story runs as follows :—

There was a king in a certain country. He opened a new market with the declaration that he would purchase everything which would remain unsold at the end of the day. One day a man brought an image of *a-Lakshmi* which was unsold. The king, true to his promise, purchased the image and brought it home. As soon as he brought the image in,

the goddess *Lakshmi* took leave from the king's house despite repeated requests for staying. At the time of departure, however, the goddess granted him a boon by which he would be able to understand the speech of ants, flies and animals. With the departure of the goddess, the king's fortune began to dwindle. One day the king ordered not to mix *ghee* with any article of food served to him, and his order was carried out. Some ants used to come to the king's dining place everyday. On the very day when *ghee* was not mixed with any food-article, the ants began to converse among them selves, "The king has become so poor that he cannot afford to have *ghee* in his meals". Listening to their conversation the King smiled. The queen who was standing by, enquired of the king the reason of his smile. The king said, "I can't tell it. If I tell you, I shall have to die". But the queen would not listen. She began to press the king to disclose the secret. The king at last had to yield. Accordingly he asked the queen to accompany him to the bank of the Ganges. When they arrived there, the king found a pair of goats grazing and a bundle of grass being carried away by the current of the river. The she-goat asked its male companion to fetch that bundle of grass. He-goat said, "I can't perish in the river for your sake. I am not a fool like the king to die for the sake of his wife". The king felt insulted and mortified at what the he-goat said, drove the queen away into the jungle and returned to the palace. In the jungle-abode the queen performed the *Lakshmi-puja* on the full-moon day of the month of *Asvina*, and her ill-luck disappeared; the goddess took pity on her and by the grace of *Lakshmi* she got back her lost wealth and prosperity as the queen.<sup>41</sup>

From this story it can reasonably be assumed that there were two groups of people, one worshipping a new *Lakshmi* and the other *a-Lakshmi* i. e. the original *Lakshmi*. There was an attempt, presumably by the Brahmanas, to discourage the worship of the latter and to replace her by the former. The new *Lakshmi* won the game and succeeded in eclipsing the old *Lakshmi*. It becomes also clear that the old *Lakshmi* image was also once openly sold in the market, and the king himself felt no scruple or was not at all afraid of purchasing it and to install it in the palace. The new *Lakshmi*, however, became angry and deprived the king of his fortune, but still he stuck to his promise and refused to neglect the old *Lakshmi*. He, however, regained his fortunes by the grace of the new *Lakshmi* after she had once more been propitiated by his queen. This device in the story was certainly meant to establish the superiority of the new *Lakshmi*.

As to the fact that *Lakshmi* herself was originally a non-Aryan deity impersonating beauty, health and wealth, a very interesting reference may be made to two sections of the *Santi-parvan* of the *Mahabharata*<sup>42</sup>. *Lakshmi* herself points out that previously she lived with the *Danavas* and the *Asuras* but she had to leave them and approach the gods. *Lakshmi* says.

*"Apakrita tatah Sakra tvayi vatsyami Vasava. Apramattiyena dharyyasmī tapasa vikramena cha"* i. e. Oh Sakra; being compelled to leave him (Vali, the king of the *Danavas*) I shall abide with thee. You should maintain me by dint of your cautious behaviour, penance and prowess.

*"Naham devendra vatsyami danaveshu iti me matih"* i.e. Oh Lord of gods! I am not able to dwell with the *Danavas* any more, this is my final decision or determination.

*"Tanmam svayamanupraptamabhinanda Sachipate"*. i.e. Oh lord of Sachi; I have approached you out of my own accord, so please accept me.

From these it becomes clear that *Lakshmi* left the *Danavas* and approached the lord of gods i. e. Indra. As to the reasons of her leaving the *Danavas* she explains that, she resides in truth, in gifts and good vows, in penances, and prowess and in virtue". Formerly the king Vali possessed all these qualities. But as he has fallen from all these, she had no other alternative but to leave him. In fact she frankly says, "Formerly I lived with the *Asuras* on account of their being full of truth and merit. Seeing, however, that the *Asuras* have assumed adverse virtues, I have left them and wish to live with you". Again she says, "On account of these and other works of wicked conduct and the change of their former nature, I shall not ... live among them any longer. I have therefore, come to you of my own accord." She even pointed out that along with her, seven other goddesses would also leave the *Danavas* in order to dwell with the gods who are righteous and faithful. She appealed to Indra for her acceptance and said that this would be followed by the acceptance of other gods. Then she was given a cordial welcome by all. Henceforth she became a deity of the Aryans.

From all these it becomes apparent that *Lakshmi* was a deity par-excellence of the *Danavas* and the *Asuras*. *Danava* and *Asura* are the two of the many terms used by the Aryans to designate the non-Aryans<sup>43</sup>. Therefore, it will not be far from truth to suggest that

*Laskhmi* was originally a non-Aryan deity, and that her acceptance by the brahmanical religion has been explained in the *Mahabharata* by stating that she could not live with the non-Aryans because of their evil nature and had to come of her own accord to dwell in the kingdom of the gods. Anyway there is nothing to conceal the fact that the Brahmanism did accept this non-Aryan deity of beauty, health and wealth and changed the rites to be observed in her honour according to their own creed.

Further analysis of the *Lakshmi-puja* rites shows that this *Vrata* is essentially a magical rite observed for three principal crops and for the bestowal of wealth and prosperity. Even from an analysis of the story which is narrated during the *Lakshmi-puja* in Orissa it becomes clear that the rite is associated particularly with the worship of paddy, and that this rite has come down to us from the primitive non-Aryan Savaras<sup>44</sup>. But the *Chhada* (*sloka* or *mantra*) which is chanted during the observance of the *Vrata* of the present day bears no relationship with paddy or corn. The *Chhada* runs as follows :—

“*Lakshmi-Naryana's Vrata* is the best of all *Vratas*,  
Observance of the rite makes worldly misfortunes disappear.  
The barren lady gets son, and all sorrows disappear,  
The poor get wealth, and happiness is added every day”.

Here we get no trace of paddy or corn. The *Vrata* has been transformed by the Brahmanas in such a way that the original character of the rite has been completely changed. They have succeeded, no doubt, in changing the *Chhada* but still there are many elements in the actual observance of the rite and ritual which reveal the real character of the *Vrata* to be non-Aryan.

#### Brahmanical Rites created in honour of primitive deities: *Suvachani-vrata* and others

Again some observances have been created by the Brahmanas in honour of the primitive village deities for the fulfilment of their desires. These are also mainly observed by the womenfolk. They are *Aranya-shashthi*, *Napga-anchami*, *Suvachani*, *Kulai*, etc. These were all originally primitive deities but later on absorbed by the Brahmanas and then incorporated in the Puranas. Of these, however, the most commonly observed rite is the *Suvachani-vrata*. It is observed by the married women alone and the widows are not allowed to participate. The *Vrata* is observed on Sunday or Thursday early in the morning<sup>45</sup>. In the evening of the previous day the observer

collects betel-nuts, betel-leaves, mustard oil, vermillion, and a grinding stone on a *chaluni* (sieve). Early in the morning the observer along with her married lady friends assembles at the junction of two cross-pathways and places the grinding-stone, on both sides of which are placed betel nuts and leaves. Then a figure of the deity is painted on the stone with vermillion mixed with oil. These betel nuts and leaves are offered to the evil spirits known as *Thunto* and *Thunti* or *Thunto-pirs*. The devotee then recites the *mantram* facing the east in the following words :

"Om ! salutation to *Suvachani*, the honoured of three worlds, the protectress from calamities, who has four faces as red as lotuses, three eyed, and breasts swollen up with milk, white robed, seated on a swan, possessed of supreme bliss, with *kamandalu* in her hands, and with one hand raised in an attitude of compassion and another of chastisement."

Several other *mantras* are also chanted along with the offering of flowers addressing the deity as *Tanadevi* and *Suvachani-durga*. The swan is also worshipped. Then the devotee narrates a story glorifying the compassion shown by the deity to her devotee, to all those assembled. Then betel-leaves and nuts and other items of *prasada* are distributed amongst those present. According to the story the son of a poor brahmin widow who had stolen a duck from the king's palace, was imprisoned but was released later on as a result of the observance of the rite by the widowed mother.

A critical analysis of this *Vrata* shows that it is a primitive rite observed in honour of a benevolent female deity associated with the duck for getting rid of all distress and difficulties. The deity in question is addressed variously such as *Suvachani*, *Subhachani*, *Subha-chaudi*, *Suvachani-durga*. etc. *Suvachani* literary means one possessed of good speech, and *Subha-chandi* is the benevolent *Chandika*. From the mantra chanted it is clear that she is a female deity associated with the duck. The features of this *Vrata* have no bearing on good speech. Prof. P. C. Bagchi thinks that the word *Subhachani* which is grammatically incorrect, is a contraction of the name *Subha chandi*. He also considers *Subha-chandi* as the original name of the deity and connects her with Durga. He concludes that "it is a worship of several popularized aspects of *Chandika*" and that it is a "creation of that tendency which wanted to popularize the higher forms of worship which could not be easily grasped by the masses" <sup>46</sup>. This *Vrata* is not meant only to popularize the higher forms of worship but rather it shows a tendency

and process by which the popular or the primitive rites were absorbed in higher brahmanical forms of worship. The observance of the rite clearly shows that they have nothing in common with the brahmanical rites. Besides, the deities worshipped are undoubtedly non-Aryan as already observed. It may also be pointed out in this connection that the Vrata in question passed through several stages of modification and interpolation. It shows how converts from Hindu lower castes to Islam came to name their old gods and goddess as *Pirs* or *saints*.

Similarly there is another very common *Vrata* observed in Bengal i. e. *Shashthi-puja vrata*. This rite is observed by the women only. *Shashthi*, the most popular deity with the women, is worshipped all over India under different forms such as *Chathi*, *Satvai*, *Sathei*, *Sathi*, etc. In western Bengal there are twelve different *Shashthis* worshipped in twelve months—*Dhula-shashthi* in *Baisak*, *Aranya sashthi* in *Jyaishtha*, *Koda-shashthi* in *Ashadha*, *Lotan-shashthi* in *Sravan*, *Manthan-shashthi* in *Bhadra*, *Durga shashthi* in *Asvina*, *Gota-shashthi* in *Kartika*, *Mula-shashthi* in *Agrahayana* *Pata-shashthi* in *Paush*, *Sital-shashthi* in *Magha*, *Asoka-shashthi* in *Falguna* and *Lal shashthi* in *Chaitra*. Of these twelve *Shashthis* *Aranya-shashthi* which is locally called *Jamai shashthi* is more popular. The son-in-law goes to the father-in-laws' house and the rite is observed in which the son-in-law is revered and honoured with all sorts of delicious dishes. In Eastern Bengal this *Shashthi-puja* alone is observed.

There are numerous tales current in Bengal on the efficacy of the observance of the rite and to show that she is no other than the presiding deity of child-birth. According to one story current in Western Bengal a lady partook some articles of food to be offered to the deity but when the mother-in-law enquired about it, she said that a black cat had eaten it. At this *Shashthi* became very angry, and the black cat started carrying away all the children born to her. Once it so happened that when the black cat carried away a newly born baby, the mother saw it and followed the cat but could not proceed further and soon fell down on the ground. Then the goddess appeared and scolded the cat for being so cruel to the mother. The goddess ordered the return of all the sons carried away, and asking the mother to observe the *Shashthi-puja-Vrata* disappeared.

From this story it becomes clear that she is identified with the black cat or it may be said that the black cat is her *vahana* or vehicle, and

that she is the guardian deity of child-birth. Hence her worship is so common with the married women.

She is, no doubt, a tribal deity – a guardian deity of child-birth and childhood. She is not mentioned in the Vedas, Epics, etc. She has been later transformed into a protector of children and identified with the great *Devi*. In the *Devi-bhagavata* and *Brahmavaivarta-Purana* she has been identified with the great Mother-goddess *Durga*, the mother of the universe.

There are similar other instances of the folk worship of tribal origin of vegetal deities like *Rupesvari*, *Budi*, *Gauri-thakurani*, etc.<sup>47</sup>

#### Various methods and processes of absorption and acculturation of non-Aryan and primitive rites and practices by the Brahmanas

There is a class of *Vratas* whose names are still primitive but the rites and rituals have been completely changed. One such *Vrata* is that of the *Kukkuti-vrata* which is still observed by the primitive tribes of Chota Nagpur for the prevention of abortion and for obtaining sons. The Brahmanas have accepted it in their own way by completely changing the rites and the rituals. This *Vrata* has been described in the *Bhavisya-Purana* and has been also included in the *Purahita-darpana* (a digest for the priests). We are told,

*Bhadre masi suklapakshe saptamyam niyamena yah  
Samstva sivamlekhayitva mandale tu sahambikam  
Pujayechcha tada dusprapya naiva vidyate.*<sup>48</sup>

To the women who worship the images of Siva and Durga (Ambika) painted in a circle on the 7th days of *Suklapaksha* in the month of *Bhadra*, there is nothing unobtainable in this world. This is also called *Lalitasaptami*. *Samkalapa* is to be done as follows:—

“*Adyetyadi* (a) *amukagotrah* (b) *sri-amukadevi* (c) *anavachchhinasantati dhanadhanya-mahaisvaryyapraptipurvaka-Sivaloka prapti-kamah ganapatyadi nanadevata pujapurvakam Siva-durga-puja – tat-kathasravana-rup-kukkuti-vratam aham karishye*”<sup>49a</sup>

It follows from this that after worshipping Ganesha and other deities Siva and Durga are to be worshipped, and that the worshipper shall be provided with paddy and wealth and shall be finally elevated to *Sivaloka*. Thus the *Vrata* seems to have been completely brahmanised,

(a) *adyarbhya* in the case of the first year of the observance of the rite

(b) the name of the *gotra* of the observer is to be uttered ;

(c) the name of the observer is to be uttered.



there being no trace of its non-Aryan character excepting the admission that the devotee is observing the *Kukkuti-vrata* though she actually worships Siva and Durga. If it would have been Siva-Durga worship, why is the rite called *Kukkuti-Vrata*? This raises suspicion which becomes clear from the *Vrata-katha* which is to be narrated after the completion of the rite. Here, of course, the Brahmanas could not successfully create a story with all the gaps and the flaws consistently filled up.

In the *Bhavishya-purana* the story has been told by *Lomasa-muni* who enjoins the observance of the rite for obtaining sons and for the protection of the newly-born children. Once Chandramukhi, the queen of the king Nahusa and Mallika, the wife of the *purahita* (priest), went to the banks of Sarayu where they met Urvashi, Menaka and other *apsaras* observing certain rites. They learnt on enquiry that the *apsaras* were observing *Kukkuti-vrata*. The queen, however, observed that they were really worshipping Siva and Durga. But still they described the rite as *Kukkuti-vrata*. Here is the gap which the Brahmanas could not fill up. Then follows an explanation of the name of *Kukkuti*. The queen and the wife of the priest learnt the rituals from the *apsaras* and began its observance. The *Rani* (queen), however, soon forgot the rituals of the *Vrata* but Mallika did not. As a merit of the observance of the rite Mallika became a *Kukkuti* with the knowledge of the past and Chandramukhi became a monkey. Mallika by observing the rite led a happy and prosperous life but Chandramukhi had to pass her days in great hardship. At last Mallika taught the rituals of the *Vrata* to the queen, and the latter by observing the same became free from all sorts of sorrows and anxieties. As Mallika did observe the rite even when she was a *Kukkuti*, the rite has been named after her. Devaki lost her sons whenever born due to the onslaught of Kamsa, and Lomasa-muni advised her to observe this *Vrata*.

From this story it becomes clear that in an unguarded moment the Brahmanas described the rite as *Kukkuti-vrata* (the old and the real name of the rite) but when they realized their mistakes, they created a new story in order to justify the name of the rite. In the *Markandeya Purana* Durga is described as surrounded not only by the peacocks but also by the cocks, *Kukkuta* 47b. Thus here we find that the name of the primitive rite has been retained, but the rites and the rituals have been completely brahmanised.

There is also another class of *Vratas* associated with trees and plants, flowers etc. which have retained their older characteristics but were later on included in brahmanical rituals. The names of such rites have been either changed or retained. Of such rites mention may be

made of *Navapatrika* during the *Durga-puja* and the worship of *Vana-Durga* in Eastern Bengal. The worship of the *Navapatrika* (nine plants) is undoubtedly a survival of the non-Aryan vegetation spirit of Tree-goddess<sup>48</sup>. In Eastern Bengal *Vana-Durga* is worshipped in all ceremonies of an auspicious nature. In the district of Mymensingh the deity is believed to reside in *sheora-tree* (*Streblus aspera*) which is also worshipped; in the district of Tipperah she is worshipped at the foot of *kamini-tree* (*Murraya exotica*). An examination of the rites reveals that the goddess is believed to reside in trees, and that she is worshipped at the foot of the respective trees without any image of the deity. But the most interesting features of these rites are the offerings of duck's eggs, pigs, etc. and the sacrifice of cocks which are strictly prohibited as offerings to the deities of the orthodox Hindu pantheon. All these features are undoubtedly non-Aryan and have nothing to do with the brahmanical cult. It seems that this tree-goddess was originally non-Aryan and later on Brahmanas gave the name *Vana-Durga* to the original primitive tree-goddess.<sup>49</sup>

Again the Brahmanas created another *Vrata* which is observed with flowers only. This is called *Pushpa-dvitiya-vratam* which is to be observed on the second day of the bright half of every month. The main features of this rite is not to eat anything but only flowers. On the completion of the rite, presents consisting of flowers made of gold are made to the Brahmanas. As a merit of this rite the observer obtains "heavenly enjoyment and a metallic car".

There are also similar other deities presiding over tress and forests, who are also worshipped by the women of Bengal. Most interesting of such deities are *Vanadevi* or *Buda-Thakurani*. "They... ..make semi-circular bracelets of rice-flour paste, coloured red at one end and yellow at the other... ..These bracelets symbolize.....the tree-goddess." They also make an artificial forest by planting twigs of *hibiscus*-shrub and *sheora-tree* and dig a miniature tank in the court-yard, a number of ornamental scrolls and floral designs are painted with *pithuli* (liquid rice-paste) round the tank. The observance of the rite consists of listening to the legends with the semi-circular bracelets of rice-flour on the palm and then throwing of the same into the forest and tank. From all these traits of the rite Prof. Mitra concludes that in very ancient times Bengal, particularly Eastern Bengal, where this rite is very common, was covered by jungles, forests, etc. inhabited by aboriginal tribes who used to worship the deity of the forest in very much the same manner.

These rites also indicate the survival of the cult of water-deity.<sup>50</sup> In the process of hinduisation, however, this non-Aryan primitive cultural trait was not altogether given up by the women who as usual continued the observance of the rite under the usual name of *Vana-devi* or *Buda-Thakurani*. But the chief traits of the rite are still essentially non-Aryan. In Eastern Bengal again the Baruis (or *Barujivis* i.e. those that have *pan* growing as their living; in Austric language the word for *pan* is *bar*; the place where *bar* is grown is *baraj* and hence *Barujivi*) celebrate a similar rite on the *Navami-puja*-day in the month of Sept.-Oct. in their *pan*-garden without the help of any priest. Plantains, sugar, rice, etc. are placed in the garden and then the worshippers retire. In Vikramapura (Dacca) this deity is called *Sungai*.<sup>51</sup> Besides, in lower Bengal we have the common prevalence of a cult of the old lady or *Budi*. She is represented by the *sheora* tree (*Tropis aspera*) and worshipped by women for the protection of children. In Northern Bengal there is another festival where dancing with bamboo poles and lighted torch predominates. An analysis of this cult shows that she is a non-Aryan deity of fertility cult brahmanised at a later period<sup>52</sup>.

Certain other rites, presumably non-Aryan in origin and character have also been accepted and sanctioned by Brahmanism such as *Vrishabhavrata* and the *Nadi-vrata*. In the former, one bestows on the Brahmanas a bull clad in a white robe and bedecked with ornaments. This *Vrata* seems to have been introduced in imitation of the common folk-rite called *Gokal-vrata* (rites observed in honour of the cattle) and other primitive cattle rites. In the *Nadi vrata* the observer worships seven different sacred streams on seven consecutive days along with the offering of milk to water and a pot filled with milk to the Brahmanas. On the completion of the rite a *pala* of silver is given to the Brahmanas. Such worships of the flowing streams rivers, etc. are also to be found commonly performed by the primitive tribes.

In other *Vratas* again we find an adjustment being made between the Hindu and the primitive methods of worship and the observance of the rituals. Such a *Vrata* is the *Raul-Durga-vrata*. Once Hara and Parvati were playing dice. All on a sudden Siva said, "Who has won?" Durga also said, "Who has won?" A Brahmana who was sitting by their side said, "Mother has won". At this Siva become very angry and immediately cursed the Brahmana to be attacked with leprosy. Durga took pity upon the Brahmana and taught him to observe the *Raul-Durga-vrata*. *Raul* is a modified form of *Rai* which means the sun. Thus here is an ingenious combination of the worship of the sun and Durga.

The Brahmanas also introduced a number of rites and vowed observances, presumably independently by themselves, to emphasize the significance of *tithis* and *nakshatras*, and these have been also included in the Puranas. Such rites are *Akshaya-tritīya*, *Aghora-chaturdasi*, *Bhuta-chaturdasi*, *Narasimha-chaturdasi*, etc. It has been further enjoined that the performance of these sacred rites would enable one to earn *punya* and good fortune. There are some other *Vratas* such as *Pashana-chaturdasi*, *Dyuta-pratipad*, etc. which have been referred to in certain *Smriti*-works of early Bengal. According to the *Kalaviveka*, *Pashana-chaturdasi* is observed in the month of *Agrahayana* when cakes are to be eaten at night. The other is the rite in which dice is played, the success of which is supposed to bring happiness. Besides these, the *Kalaviveka* mentions also some other rites such as *Akshaya-tritīya*, *Asokashtami*, *Panchami-vrata*, etc. all of which have been introduced to emphasize the importance of *tithis* and *nakshatras*.

Still there are other *Vratas* which seem to have been evolved by the Brahmanas for their personal profit. These are *Dadhi-sankranti-vrata*, *Kala-chhada-vrata*, *Gupta-dhan-vrata*, etc. From an analysis of these rites it becomes clear that they are mainly concerned with the gifts and presents made to the Brahmanas which alone is supposed to bring forth the desired objects of the observers. Thus in *Kala-chhada-vrata* the plantains are to be given to the Brahmanas; in *Gupta-dhan-vrata* coins put in sweet cakes are offered to the Brahmanas. These rites might have been created by the Brahmanas in imitation of the older primitive magical rites.

Not satisfied with these the Brahmanas also created a number of rites to replace the older ones which the women of Bengal used to observe from time immemorial. Such a rite is *Adarsimhasana-vrata* or *Adurasimhasana-vrata* created by the women themselves for pleasing their husbands and thereby to win their love and affection. On the occasion of this *Vrata* wives of 30 Brahmanas are entertained on each day of the month of *Baisaka* when this *Vrata* is observed. How the Brahmanas absorbed the older rites and how they introduced numerous other rites after the older ones become clear from their attitude towards this and similar other rites. This *Vrata* is observed by women in the month of *Baisaka*. Elaborate paintings are done on wooden planks, and a married woman is invited to take her seat on it. Her hands, feet, etc. are then washed and feet decorated with *alta*, and vermillion is put on her forehead. Then she is given a feast. In this

way the rite is observed during the whole month and for four years continuously. By performing this rite the devotee is said to gain the love and affection of her husband. A similar *Vrata*-rite has been mentioned by Kalidasa. This is called *Priya-prasadan-vrata* intended for gaining the pleasure of the husband.<sup>53</sup> Almost similar is the rite called *Nakhchhuter-vrata*. Such rites naturally evoked the jealousy of the Brahmanas, and they introduced a similar rite called *Brahmanadar-vrata*. Every day in the month of Baisaka a Brahmana is fed along with proper *dakshina*. In this way *Madhusankranti*, *Mishanna-sankranti* and similar other rites were introduced by them to counteract the older folk rites.

The religion of the non-Aryan people is also manifest in the worship of a number of tribal village deities who have no recognition either in the Puranas or in any other sacred literature. Some of these deities are still worshipped in different parts of Bengal. These are the village godlings like *Gabhu-Dalam*, *Dakshina-ray*, *Vaghaj*, *Mochra-singha*,<sup>53a</sup> etc. In Eastern Bengal we find some other godlings or goddesses as *Ekachura*, *Bra*, *Kumara*, *Lahasa*, *Visvesvara*, *Khala-kumavi*,<sup>54</sup> etc. In the cult of *Jay-Durga* practised in different parts of the district of Faridpur we find the names of a number of unknown deities who are worshipped. These are *Dakshinesvari*, *Magadhesvari*,<sup>55</sup> etc. They are certainly unknown to the Puranas and the Hindus have accepted them by introducing certain elements of brahmanical rites and rituals. But the original character of the rite is still apparent. There are certain other deities who were originally non-Aryan but later on the Brahmanas sanctioned their worship with slight alteration here and there and also by creating new deities but maintaining at the same time the original ones. Such deities are *Manasa* and *Sitala* and perhaps also *Satyana-narayana*<sup>56</sup>. There are similar other folk festivals which are very common in Bengal. Of these mention may be made of *Holi-festival*, *Dharma-puja*, *Chadak-festival*, etc. All these were originally non-Aryan and primitive festivals. They were brahmanised in a very late period<sup>57</sup>.

### CONCLUSION

From what has been said above it is clear that the *Vratas* are the vowed observances consisting of numerous rites and rituals which are mainly magical in character. They are the religious observances neither of the so-called Aryans nor of the later Brahmanas but of the non-Aryans whom the Aryans described as *Dasas*, *Dasyus*, etc. who perform-

ed other religious rites and practices i. e. *anya-vrata*. In the process of aryanization and brahmanisation the non-Aryans were absorbed within the brahmanical fold and their cult, the *Vrata*-rites were assimilated, remnants of which are still to be found in the lower strata of the brahmanical cults and rituals. Even in the so-called *sastriyavratas* which have been sanctioned by the Brahmanas and included in the Puranas and in other sacred texts of the Hindus we find numerous non-Aryan traits and elements. In some cases attempts have been made to veil them with the injunctions of the Puranas and the Tantras. This happened presumably when neo-Brahmanism during the age of the Guptas and later began to create new gods and goddesses, sometimes to replace the older ones, but often to assimilate them and their rites and to associate them with the new deities created by them. They made an attempt to transform the primitive deities and their rites and rituals in conformity with brahmanical patterns. It was a process of constant absorption which is clear from the statements of the Puranas and other brahmanical literature. Thus Vyasa says, "*desanushthiam-kuladharmagrahanam sagotra-dharmam na hi samtyajejchcha*" i.e. the native customs that are not contrary to the basic principles of *Dharma* of ones' gotra may be accepted and practiced.

It seems strange that inspite of the wonderful assimilative power of Hinduism and the proselytizing activities of the Brahmanas these *Vrata*-rites and other folk-religious observances of Bengal have succeeded in maintaining their separate entity even to this day. There is no denying the fact that some of the external features of these rites have been changed and influenced from out-side; but the most essential traits and basic features of these *Vrata*-practices have been left unaltered. These *Vrata*-rites and practices are the national rites of the people. They have persisted through ages in spite of the infiltration of many alien ideas. They have been, no doubt, transformed from time to time, but still the original character persists and can be traced only by a critical analysis of the rites and rituals still current amongst the common people. The *Vrata*-rites, truly speaking, are the living records of the socio-religious rites and rituals of the people whom the so-called Aryans absorbed and integrated. Non-Aryan cultural traits have been still preserved in the rites and practices, in the ritual songs, ritual paintings and ritual tales which inspite of centuries of brahmanical acculturation still survive in rural areas. And it can be said that the *Vrata*-rites of Bengal have not yet been wholly built into the "temple of Hinduism" and contain much of the *Vratya*-cult of the pre-vedic Indians.

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17. It has also been laid down that with regard to the observance of the *Vratas* no discrimination of caste and creed will be made. (*avicharena..... anushtheyam*) See Matsya Purana (Bangavasi Edition), p. 132 Agni Purana, p. 355 ; Garuda Purana, pp. 304-305.
18. *Manusamhita* (Bangavasi Edition), Chapt. V. sl. 155. p. 144.
19. Winternitz, History of Indian Literature, Vol. II. p. 292.
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27. Vatsyayana in his *Kamasutra* refers to numerous folk rites and practices. Of the popular festivities mention may be made of :

(1) Festival of the green Mango : a spring festival, when parties of men and women went out to gather mangoes in the public orchards and woods ; (2) Festival of Baked Corn : an early spring festival, when people went out to the fields and pic-nicked of baked cobs of young corn ; (3) Lotus-stalk Festival, an all weather festival

when people went out to the lakes and public tanks and fished up lotus-stalks; (4) Early Rain Festival: in this the people celebrated the first sprouting of crops by pick-nicking in the open; (5) Water-spraying Festival: this is somewhat similar with the present *Holi* festival, water being sprayed on to others' bodies by means of a bamboo syringe—even to-day in rural parts this type of syringe is used by the boys during the *Holi*; (6) Imitating the *Panchala* Festival: in this the citizen imitated the ways of the people of *Panchala* in a kind of mass burlesque; (7) *Simul* Festival: in this the people assemble under a spreading *Simul*-tree and played with its flowers; (8) *Kadamba* Festival: in this the people fought mock battles with balls of *Kadamba* flowers as missiles; (9) Barley Festival: in this perfumed barley powder was spread on the bodies of another; (10) Swing Festival: in this the people went up on swings (*Jhulano*); (11) Madana Festival: a festival in honour of the god of love held in spring; (12) *Holi*: the well known spring festival of India; (13) *Damanaka* Festival; (14) *Asoka* Festival; (15) Floral Festival; (16) Mango Blossom Festival; (17) Sugarcane Festival: The last five festivals centered round well known flowers and plants. See. *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana, Translated by B. N. Basu, pp. 39-40. It is interesting to note that some of these rites are still commonly practised in rural parts of India, and some of them are also similar to our *Vrata*-rites.

28. Fleet, Gupta Inscriptions, pp. 75-246; E. I. Vol. XXIII. p. 174; Vol. XXIV. p. 261; Vol. X. p. 75; I. A., Vol. VII. p. 28.

29. Man in India, Vol. V. p. 244.

30. Ibid. Vol. XII. 1932, p. 333.

31. Ibid. Vol. XVI. 1936, pp. 38-67.

32. Ibid. pp. 156-59.

32a. Lakshmi is used only once in the Rigveda (10, 71, 2) in the sense of beauty and excellence. It is not used in the sense of goddess Lakshmi. It occurs in this sense in the Khila-Sri-Sukta of the Rigveda.

33. Muir, Sanskrit Texts, Vol. V. pp. 348-49.

34. Spence, Myths of Mexico and Peru, p. 295.

35. Ibid. pp. 86-89; Tagore, A., *Vanglar-Vrata*.

36. Ibid. p. 85;

37. Man in India, Vol. 32. No. 2. 1952, p. 109.

38. Frazer, Golden Bough, p. 578.

39. Rao, Hindu Iconography, Vol. I. p. 11.

40. It can further be proved that the female deities particularly those that are considered to be malignant were contributions of the non-Aryans to the Brahmanical religion. Such deities are *Jalapaharini*, *Yogini*, *Dakini*, *Preteni*, *Kali*, etc. Continuous process of assimilation and absorption had, however, made considerable progress when the Puranas were written which gave the final shape to all these non-Aryan deities. This process of absorption of primitive deities began as early as the *Atharva-Veda*. We have already seen how traces of such absorption can be found in the hymns.

41. Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1930, p. 390.

42. *Sriman Mahabharata* by Pandit Ram Chandra Sastri. *Santiparvan*, Sections, 225-228; *The Mahabharata, Santiparvan*,—English Translation by M. N. Dutta, pp. 336-347.

43. Journal of the Asiatic Society, Vol. XVII. No. 3. 1951. Mr. P. C. Sen Gupta has tried to identify the *Danavas* with the people of Mehenjodaro by



showing some similarities between the Indus-Valley and the *Danava* culture.' Thereby he wants to shift the date of the *Mahabharata* to the 3rd millennium B. C.

44. *Man in India*, Vol. XVI. 1936, p. 65.

45. *Ibid.* Vol. II. 1922, pp. 64-68.

46. *Ibid.* pp. 67-68.

47. *Ibid.* Vol. XXII. 1942, pp. 69-70.

47a *Purahita-Darpana*.

47b *Markandeya Purana-Durgasaptasati*, XI, 51. My attention to this information has been drawn by Prof. N. N. Chaudhuri.

48. Chanda, *Indo-Aryan Races*, pp. 130-32; *Man in India*, Vol. II. p. 233.

49. *Man in India*, Vol. II p. 238; *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1915, p. 175; *Pravasi, Ashadha*, 1329 (1922), pp. 356-57.

50. *Man in India*, Vol. II. pp. 238-41.

51. It is commonly believed that the *pan*-plant was planted and cultivated by the Brahmanas; its charge was then given to the Kayasthas. Hence a Brahmana does not enter into a *pan*-garden. See. Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Vol. II. p. 72.

52. *Man in India*, Vol. XX. p. 78.

53. Upadhaya, *India in Kalidasa*, p. 327. (53a) *B. C. Law Volume*, Part. I. p. 75.

54. *Man in India*, Vol. III. p. 40.

55. *Ibid.* Vol. XI. 1931, pp. 47-48.

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57. Bose, *Spring Festival of India* (Reprint from *Man in India*), pp. 144, 128-32, 127; *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1942. p. 135; *B. C. Law Volume*, Part. I. pp. 679, 75, 86; Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Vol. I. pp. 115, 124.

## THE THARUS\*

*By P. C. Roy Choudhuri*

### Risley's Description

THE Tharus, a tribe about fifty thousand in population in Champaran district on the border of Nepal are in a state of transition. H. H. Risley in Volume II of the "Tribes and Castes in Bengal", published in 1891, gave a lengthy description of the Tharus. Risley thought that the Tharus are essentially "an aboriginal tribe who had been gradually driven up into sub-Himalayan forests by the expansion of the Aryan community and are found in scattered settlements from the Kosi river in Purnea to the Sarda between Kumaon and Nepal". According to Risley, the Tharus belong to the large group of aboriginal races who are known as Dravidian or Kolarian, according to the character of the language which they speak. He dismissed the claim of the Tharus as originally coming from Rajputana after invasion of Rajputana by the Mohammedans as fiction. Risley describes the religion of the Tharus as a compound of animism and nature-worship and of some elements borrowed from popular Hinduism. He mentions Rikheswar as being the principal deity worshipped by the Tharus. Regarding their social status, Risley mentions that no orthodox Hindu will eat with a Tharu or take water from the hands of the Tharu.

### Present Picture, quite different

An enquiry into the condition of the Tharus now gives a picture which is very different from what Risley gave us half a century ago. The Tharu of 1952 will revolt at the idea of being described as an aboriginal. There does not appear to be the slightest trace of animism or nature-worship in their religion. Nobody in the Tharubhat (colony of the Tharus) knows what Rikheswar is. The Tharus today do not stand outside the Hindu caste organization. As a matter of fact the present day Tharu has got into the fold of *Jalchal* Hindus or caste Hindus of Bihar. They have recently got a ruling from the Nepal Government recog-

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\* This tribe has identified themselves with Hindus on their own initiative without conversion. This is a typical example of the effect of culture contact and the contact of races.—D. N. M.

hizing them as caste Hindus. There is a large population of Tharus in Nepal who are recognized as caste Hindus. If Risley was correct in his conclusion mentioned above, the last three scores of years have definitely brought in a complete change among the Tharus through the process of assimilation, and today the Tharus have completely hinduised themselves discarding even the core of their tribal beliefs and practices.

### **Higher Caste origin of Women ?**

The Tharus live in an area extending over 800 square miles on the northern border of Champaran bounded on the north, east and the west by Nepal territory and on the south by the Tribeni canal. This area is included in the two Estates of Bettiah and Ramnagar Raj and comprises of parts of Bagaha, Ramnagar, Shikarpur and Mainatani police stations. The tract is essentially a forest area, damp and malarious. There is also a considerable number of Tharus in Gorakhpur district and in Nepal. The Tharus claim that their original home was in Thar district of Rajputana and assert that because of Muslim inroads they fled towards Nepal, a portion settling down in Champaran while another entered Nepal. They claim that they are purely Aryan. A popular story is that in their flight, when they reached the jungle area of Champaran on the border of Nepal, the males decided to leave the bulk of the female folk in charge of their servants in the wilds of Champaran and thought that the males should make a reconnaissance of Nepal first. After several months when they came back they found that some of the women had been forced by the servants to live with them as their wives. So, that section of female folk was left behind in Champaran and originated the branch of the Tharus in Champaran. A peculiar but suggestive custom prevails among the Tharu women in Champaran. They do not allow the husband or the male progeny to come into the kitchen and no Tharu woman will eat any food partially partaken by her husband or a male progeny. If not anything else, this practice going against the fundamentals of Hindu family life, suggests the higher caste origin of the women. It is also peculiar that Tharu women are more comely in their appearance and have a fairer complexion.

### **Caste Consciousness—now a Backward Class**

There has been a sort of dissatisfaction among the Tharus since 1946, which is slowly becoming more and more vocal in recent times. This is in connection with the caste position of the Tharus. In the Census of 1941 the Tharus had been enumerated as a member of

the Scheduled Tribes, which status the people refused to accept. The State Government of Bihar conceded their demand and the Tharus now stand excluded from the list of scheduled tribes and in the Census of 1951 they have been enumerated as a member of the Backward Classes. The Tharus have got for themselves a comparatively higher social status. The first session of the Tharu Sammelan was held on 9-5-46 and it was presided over by Shri Chamari Khatait.

### Religion and Language

Risley's description of dancing and singing by the Tharu girl on festivities accompanied by the men drinking and other gaieties like the Santhals is a myth now. There cannot be any inter-marriage between the eight sub-castes into which the Tharus are sub-divided. The present day Tharus worship Kali, Siva, Mahavir, Satyanarayan and other common deities worshipped by the Hindus and observe the common Hindu festivals in Bihar like Chhat, Diwali, Holi, Janmastmi, Anant, Etwar, Ekadashi etc. On a representation by Sri Kumari Khatait, a seasoned Tharu gentleman, the Nepal Government through their phone number 16533 dated Kartik 8 Catey Roj 1 Subham Sambat 2005 had intimated that the Nepal Government recognized the Tharu as a high class Hindu (*Sabarn*). The language is common Bhojpuri dialect or the Hindustani language as spoken by the other people of the area. It is absolutely incorrect or at least absolutely outmoded to say that they speak in a different aboriginal dialect as described by Risley. The Tharus in Nepal speak Nepali. The Tharus recognize divorce and the divorced women marry again by undergoing the same ceremony as in widow marriage. They rear pigs but pig's meat is eaten now by a small percentage of the Tharus. It is significant that the Tharus, in process of hinduization, are giving up eating pigs. Wild boars are much relished for their meat.

### Village Life, Aspirations

The Tharus live by agriculture. In order to save them from the money-lenders or *baniyas* the State Government of Bihar in the first Congress Ministry had prohibited sale or transfer of the land of a Tharu without permission of Government. Although this legislative measure is calculated to ameliorate the condition of the Tharus it is not looked upon by them with favour. Having won in their agitation against classification as an aboriginal tribe they are now smarting under this restriction and they have put in a representation against it.

They are very backward educationally. So far, only one Tharu has passed the B. A. examination and two are reading for Intermediate examination. There are about 12 matriculates. It is creditable on the part of the Tharus, so backward educationally, to have sponsored the agitation before the Constituent Assembly in New Delhi that the Tharus should be excluded from the list of the scheduled tribes of Bihar (8th Schedule, Part V of page 205 of the Draft Constitution of India). A memorandum was submitted before the President of the Constituent Assembly making out a strong case in which it was mentioned that all the ceremonies in marriage and *sradh* of the Tharus were exactly as observed by other caste Hindus. It was also mentioned that His Majesty the Maharaja of Nepal and the Nepal Government have recognized the Tharus as caste Hindus. They won their case, and the Tharus were excluded from the list of scheduled tribes but they have been put in the list of backward classes. The Bihar Government have appointed a special officer for carrying on welfare measures among the Tharus. Shri Kumari Khatait told the writer that they want a declaration that they are caste Hindus and they should not be treated as a backward class. Through the influence of the Arya Samaj, they are now taking the sacred thread. The incidence of drinking liquor is going down.

### Present Condition

The life in a Tharu village is free from complexities. Every Tharu village has got a Mukhia or headman who is called a Kazi or Gumasta. There are village Panches as well who decide all important matters with the help of the Mukhia. The posts of Panches and Mukhias are hereditary, although the principle of election is recognized. In all social matters the orders of the headman are obeyed. Instances of litigation in law courts among the Tharus are very few. Agriculture is their main occupation. Dried fish is usually preserved for the rainy season. The Tharus depend on the primitive system of irrigation by means of temporary dams on hilly rivulets and pynes for cultivation. This system works only satisfactorily when there is regular rainfall and this is why, in the last three or four years of continuous drought, their entire cultivation has failed and they have been hard hit economically. The Tharus are very backward in their agricultural technique. There is no purdah among the women. Child marriage is widely prevalent, widow marriage is in vogue. There are 7 Upper Primary, 28 Lower Primary, one girls Lower Primary and 3 Basic Schools in the Tharu area. In all there are about 800 students in the Primary classes. The young Tharu children are becoming school-minded.

The recent welfare measures for the Tharus to meet the continuous drought for the last four years include about one hundred irrigational projects under the Minor Irrigation Schemes and distribution of *taccavi* loan or agricultural loan. Several old tanks have been re-excavated and some surface wells and tube wells are being sunk. Three new dispensaries have been opened in the area.

The Tharus offer a field for intensive study as to how an aboriginal or semi-aboriginal tribe in the course of fifty or sixty years have completely lost their tribal culture and beliefs and have been able to hinduize themselves. In the process of assimilation and up-grading that is going on, it will not be strange if in another few decades they become a separate caste or become merged in the Rajput caste of Bihar.

## INDIAN ANTHROPOLOGY IN CURRENT LITERATURE

*By S. R. Das*

### 1. JOURNAL OF THE ASIATIC SOCIETY,

Vol. XVIII. No. 1, 1952, (Science)

#### (a) Korku Physical Type and Racial Affinities

*By K. P. Chattopadhyay*

#### (b) Somatic Characters and Racial Affinities of the Kannikars of Travancore State

*By Dr. B. K. Chatterji and G. D. Kumar*

#### (c) The Somatic Characters and the Racial Affinities of the Santals of the Santal Parganas

*By Dr. B. K. Chatterji and G. D. Kumar*

This issue of the Society's Journal contains three important papers on Physical Anthropology. In the first paper Prof. K. P. Chattopadhyay discusses the physical type and the racial affinities of the Korkus. His study is based on the measurement of 51 adult male Korkus. This paper has been illustrated with a few photographs and tables. In the second paper Dr. Chatterji and G. D. Kumar discuss the somatic characters and the racial affinities of the Kannikars of Travancore State. This study is based on observations and measurements of 140 adult male members. The Kannikars are short-statured, dolichocephalic and mesorhine, but occasional platyrrhiny is also present. The authors have arrived at a very important conclusion by making a comparative study of the Kannikar physical characters with those of the neighbouring tribes and castes. It has been found that there exists an appreciable difference in different characters between the Kannikars and the higher castes but the difference amongst the tribes is slight. This slight difference is not to be explained by referring to their distinct racial origin. This has been due largely to miscegenation in different degrees, incidence of inbreeding to a considerable degree within a particular group, luxurization caused by the favourable union, food and environmental factors. In the third paper the same authors discuss the somatic characters and the racial affinities of the Santals of the Santal Parganas. This paper is based on observations and measurements taken of 100 Santals of Dumka (Bihar). The Santals are of medium stature, dolicho to meso-

cephalic and mesorrhine.) A comparative study of the Santal somatic characters with those of the neighbouring castes and tribes shows no appreciable difference. Further no appreciable difference has been found out when compared with the Santals of the rest of Santal Parganas. It has been observed that the slight difference that exists has been due not to distinct racial origin but to some other factors as already observed. Both the articles contain a number of tables and photographs.

2. JOURNAL OF THE ASIATIC SOCIETY,

Vol. XVII. No. 3, 1951 (Letters)

The Danavas in the Mahabharata

By P. C. Sengupta

This is a very interesting article dealing with the Danavas who have been variously mentioned in early Indian literature as Daityas, Asuras, etc. The author has discussed the Danava culture in detail. He identifies them with the people of Mohenjodaro and Harappa. From this identification the author arrives at a far-fetched conclusion with regard to the fixing of the date of the Bharata battle at 2449 B. C. or 2300 B. C.

3. JOURNAL OF THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE,

M. S. UNIVERSITY, BARODA,

Vol. I. No. I.

Date of Harappa

By D. R. Mankad

The author identifies the vedic Hariyupiya with the present Harappa. He thinks that Harappa was an Asura settlement. He further contends that the city flourished in the days of Dasaratha, the king of Ayodhya.

4. JOURNAL OF THE BURMA RESEARCH SOCIETY,

Vol. XXIV. Part. I

The place of Anthropology among the Social Studies of Burma

By Kenneth G. Orr

The author who is a Visiting Professor of Anthropology in the University of Rangoon evaluates in this paper the Anthropological contributions in the past and "those projected for the future". The paper is followed by a very helpful bibliography on Burmese Anthropology.



## 5. UNIVERSITY OF ALLAHABAD STUDIES (ENGLISH SECTION),

1951, Part. IX. and II.

## Folk Literature of Mithila

By Dr. J. Mishra

The author being inspired by the work of Dr. D. C. Sen began his study on the folk literature of Mithila. Recently he has published two very important papers on the folk literature of Mithila. In the first part he has discussed the songs and ballads, the nursery rhymes, riddles, aphorisms and proverbs and the dramatic songs. In the second part he has dealt with the folk literature connected with the beliefs and customs and the prose tales and legends. Dr. Mishra has taken great pains in collecting the materials for his study, the results of which are presented in the form of these two valuable papers. In this connection, it is to be noted that the oral folk literature of Mithila bears a close affinity with that of Bengal.

## 6. THE INDIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIAL WORK,

Vol XII. No. 1 (Special number), June, 1952

This special number of the Journal contains a number of important articles on Sociology written by distinguished sociologists of India such as (a) Historical Background of Social Work in India by Dr. B. H. Malhotra; (b) Rural Needs and Welfare Projects by Dr. J. C. Kumarappa; (c) Problem of Illiteracy and Social Education by K. G. Saiyidain; (d) Welfare of the Industrial Worker by Dr. M. V. Moorthy; (e) History's Biggest Refugee Problem by Mr. A. P. Jain; (f) Problem of Crime in India by Col. G. R. Oberoi; (g) Education for Professional Social Work by Dr. J. M. Kumarappa.

Dr. Mehta gives a brief historical survey of the development of social service organization from the earliest times. He has begun his survey with the primitive social organization. The author contends that in earlier days religion and philanthropy had influenced social work in India but the impact of Western civilization has created a great need for scientific training. Dr. Kumarappa who is the President of the 'All-India Village Industries' Association has discussed in his paper the result of the impact of Western civilization on India's industrial system. This has resulted in creating a great gulf between urban and rural life giving rise to many complicated socio-economic problems. After making a critical analysis of the efforts made by different bodies, the author suggests ways and means for tackling these problems. Dr.

Kumarappa concludes, "If India is to hold her place in the comity of nations, she must pay greater attention to the village development, based on a careful study of her rural needs and founded on experiments carried out on well-executed projects". Mr. Saiyidain, Joint Educational Adviser, Government of India, traces in this article the development of social education in recent years. He has also given a brief description of the scheme of social education followed at present. Dr. Moorthy in his article has drawn a grim picture of the life of the industrial worker. He contends that the Trade Unions should be given more encouragement for the promotion of welfare of industrial workers. Mr. A. P. Jain, Minister for Rehabilitation, Government of India, discusses in this article the magnitude of the refugee problem in India after the achievement of Independence. He has also discussed the various ways adopted by the Government in tackling history's biggest refugee problem. Col. Oberoi has studied the problem of crime in India. He also gives an appraisal of the legislative provisions for the better treatment of juvenile and adult offenders. Dr. Kumarappa, the Director of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, gives a plan of a proper courses of study for the training of social workers.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

*By Robert H. Lowie. Rinehart and Company, Publishers, Pp. 232.  
Madison Ave, New York 16. 1948. Price \$ 4.50.*

In recent years, Anthropology has been drawing closer and closer to other social sciences. This tendency has proceeded so far that distinctions are often blurred, giving rise to the impression that Anthropology has ceased to have any special problem of its own, as distinguished from those of Sociology or even Individual Psychology. This is unfortunate, as Anthropology happens to have problems of its own, while it has developed a distinctive technique of analytical study which is likely to prove helpful even when applied to fields which are considered to lie within the orthodox domain of Sociology. Just as there has been a tendency to blur distinctions, so there has been a corresponding exaggeration on the other side, which has either tried to keep Anthropology tied down to what is known as the Primitive, or, correlate it more closely with individual psychology, on the one hand and to convert it into a 'metaphysical' study of culture on the other.

It cannot be denied that when culture is viewed as a whole, it does seem to have an individuality of its own, which has little to do with the personal attitudes and thoughts of those who participate in it. This aspect of culture has, of late, received a great deal of emphasis in the hands of writers like Leslie White; but, to the reviewer it seems that just as it would be futile to deny that most individuals set their sails willy nilly along the way in which culture *as a whole* seems to be moving, yet, this *in itself* is based upon a character of the individual or the person, which plays no small role in shaping the superorganic part which is apparently played by culture. There may be individuals who, from time to time, have pulled at their oars even against the prevailing wind, and who have thus formed the starting points of fresh movements of culture in new directions. In time, others have fallen in line with them, and created what may be described as new streams of culture which have modified the shape and direction of the old. To say that such individuals have given a voice to what was incipient, to claim that they were the focussing points of what was coming

inevitably, is to subscribe to a theory of progress which leads in a direction set by our own desires and cherished values. It is like introducing God through a back door in the shape of History, whose whole machinery leads inevitably in a direction where the poor shall be liberated. Perhaps that is not the way of Science, for Science, as we hope, is not born of Desire.

Anyway, we have merely tried to indicate how recent developments in Anthropology have been proceeding one way or the other. There has been a great deal of development in anthropological science in which new orientations have been discovered and new techniques developed in conformity with the changed outlook in the science.

One of the outstanding figures in modern Anthropology, Professor R. H. Lowie, has come forth with a book which tries to preserve the distinctness of the anthropological approach even when it does not merely concern itself with the primitive. Dr. Lowie has made a bold departure and tried to describe the social organization of mankind whether it is connected with the so-called primitive tribes or modern men. He has demonstrated how these can all be treated as parts of one single intellectual discipline.

The book is divided into four sections comprising eighteen chapters in all. The Sections and Chapter headings are listed below, and they will show how the different facets of man's experimental social organization have been interlaced together.

The Introduction consists of three chapters entitled 1. Principles of Grouping, 2. Contemporary Western Civilization and Economic Determinism, 3. Laws of Evolution; Correlation; Parallelism. The next Section on Social Institutions is formed of the following chapters: 4. Kinship, 5. Marriage, 6. Property, 7. Law, 8. Religion, 9. Education. The third section on Social Units comprises the following five chapters: 10. The Family, 11. Unilateral Descent Groups, 12. Social Strata, 13. Socialites, 14. The State. The last section entitled Social Organization in Action is formed of the following four chapters: 15. The Crow Indians, 16. The Buinese, 17. The Shilluk and 18. Imperial Austria.

The treatment is refreshingly simple; and because it is often directly related to modern life, the general reader will feel that he is treading upon familiar ground. It will thus help him to understand the anthropologist's point of view quite easily even when he has no experience of 'primitive' communities. It will also help him to

compare generalizations arrived at by historians working on 'civilized' people with those derived from a study of 'primitive' communities, and find out how far one or the other have any general validity.

N. K. Bose

**THE TRIBAL ART OF MIDDLE INDIA, A Personal Record.**

*By Verrier Elwin. Geoffrey Cumberlege. Oxford University Press, 1951. Price Rupees Twenty. Pages 224, with 229 illustrations.*

Dr. Verrier Elwin has published a sumptuously illustrated volume on the tribal art of that portion of India with which he is in love, and which he has made so well known to the anthropological world through numerous monographs. He writes in the same inimitable, personal style, with which his readers are already familiar, and succeeds in communicating to them the deep sympathy which he professes for the object of his study.

From the anthropologist's point of view, however, the book leaves one unsatisfied so far as his own science is concerned; although there is no doubt that the book may serve as a source of inspiration and help to the professional artist instead. The anthropologist has, from his own point of view, several specific questions to ask. He does not pretend to be an expert in the technique or the æsthetic value of the specimens displayed in the book. His purpose is to find out in what relation the art stands with others both in time and in space. The next significant question which concerns him is the part which art plays in relation to the social and ceremonial life of the people; how also it stands in relation to their world of thought.

Dr. Elwin has hinted that some of the designs prevalent in Middle India, as well as among the Juangs in Orissa, are the same, or nearly the same, as those which appear in Harappa or Amri or in Sannarra ware. Is it suggested that one is derived from the other? If so, how do we explain the discontinuity of distribution? Should we expect survivals of the same nature, and in greater numerical and structural concentration, among the tribes who inhabit India nearer the sources of the Indus valley civilization?

To the reviewer, again, it appears that many of the motifs, and certainly a large part of the technique, is shared by the 'tribal' people with those who inhabit rural India, and who are known as Hindus, but do not necessarily occupy the last rungs of the ladder in the social

scale of caste. This is an aspect which has been left completely untouched. Unfortunately, this is likely to create the impression that tribal art is something which stands isolated from the life of the neighbouring people. The only influence which the 'neighbours' of the tribal people have exercised upon the latter's life seems to have been, in the implied opinion of Dr. Elwin, in the direction of decadence and degeneration. He rightly regrets that 'there has been a system of education which encourages the aboriginal to despise the teachings and achievements of his own tribe'; but let him not forget that that teaching is of recent origin. What about the centuries when the 'tribals' came into intimate contact with their economically more advanced neighbours, imitated them, and considerable influence was exercised both ways in the economic, social as well as cultural life of the people? The tribal scene, drawn in isolation, leaves an incorrect impression, which can only be overcome by plenty of comparative study, little of which is unfortunately available today.

The place of tribal art in the life of the people has been drawn in clearer outline than the comparative aspects, which have lost by default. But even here, the emphasis has been on the personal aspects of life and not its institutional manifestations. Art is very often related to impulses like love, sex or the search for food. This is quite right from the individual psychologist's point of view. But what about the techniques, colour patterns, symbolisms which are not so much each individual's personal creation, but which can only be understood in their social, collective, cultural environmental relation.

But perhaps we have strained ourselves in trying to find more than what is due in a specifically 'Personal Record'. We are grateful to Dr. Elwin for what he has given us, we are equally grateful to the Publisher for his excellent production, and we do hope that we shall be treated by Dr. Elwin with the tribal art of India studied from the professional anthropologist's point of view.

N. K. Bose

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## STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION IN PRIMITIVE SOCIETY

(Essays and Addresses)

By A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. With a Foreword by E. E. Evans-Pritchard and Fred Eggan. Cohen and West Ltd., 30, Percy Street,

London, W. 1., 1952. Price 21 Shillings.

Pages, viii & 219.

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Professor Radcliffe-Brown is one of the most outstanding figures

contemporary anthropology. He has been responsible for bringing about a radical transformation in the outlook of Social Anthropology. The essays and addresses which are gathered together in this handy volume were written or delivered over a long stretch of years. While presenting them in the form of a book, the text has been left in its original form, without alteration in accordance with later developments in the thought of Professor Brown. This has been a wise step indeed; as it will help the reader with materials for tracing the changes through which the Theory of Functional Approach itself has passed.

This is not the occasion for reviewing the value of the contributions made by Professor Radcliffe-Brown in the domain of Social Anthropology. We shall merely end by recommending the book to all students of our Science, and by a thankful appreciation of the editors and publishers who have made a series of the most stimulating essays in Anthropology readily available to the average reader.

N. K. Bose

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#### OLDIVAI GORGE

*By L. S. B. Leakey. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.*

*Price 40 shillings. Pp. 1-164. 39 plates  
and 62 drawings.*

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This well-produced volume embodies a report on the evolution of the Hand-Axe Culture in Beds I-IV at Oldivai Gorge in Tanganyika in Central Africa. The study is based upon six expeditions undertaken since 1936.

Thick layers of tuff (Bed I) were deposited on a foundation of basaltic lava, followed by a transgression of the Oldivai Lake for two long periods (Beds II & IV) with a short intervening period when red earth was formed (Bed III). These four beds, all of which are implementiferous, formed a continuous section in the Middle Pleistocene of Central Africa. This was subsequently covered by a thin layer of Upper and post-Pleistocene sediments chiefly of aeolian origin. Beds I and II on the one hand and Bed IV on the other represent two distinct pluvial periods while Bed III represents a long interpluvial period. The rich Oldivai fauna indicates the Middle Pleistocene age of the four beds. The lithic culture sequence from Bed I to Bed IV reveals, according to the author, a gradual evolution from simple pebble chopping tools (called the Oldowan Culture) to beautifully made hand-axes and cleavers of late Acheulian type.

## MAN IN INDIA

Dr. Leakey is lucky that in such a small area and in such perfect stratigraphic succession, he has found the main stages of the hand-axe evolution in Africa, and credit must be given to him for his painstaking researches lasting for several years. According to Dr. Leakey, simple chopping tools (with two directional flaking) are typical of Bed I where no hand-axe has been found. At the junction of the top of Bed II with the base of Bed I, as well as in lower levels of the latter (Stages 1 to 3), simple hand-axes of Abbevillian type, appear along with chopping tools. Here (Stage 1), as Dr. Leakey points out, is the beginning of the hand-axe idea. From the upper levels of Bed II right through to Bed IV, Chelleo-Acheulian evolutionary stages of the hand-axe (Stages 4 to 11) have been discerned. The typological descriptions, photographs and sketches amply illustrate the evolutionary stages.

Though pebble tools of the Oldowan type continue to exist in Beds II, III and even IV with more advanced tools (hand-axes), Dr. Leakey does not contend that the Oldowan Culture persisted as an independent culture alongside the development of the Chelleo-Acheulian Hand-Axe Culture. In his opinion, the Oldowan culture did not persist (in Bed II to IV) but only the *types* persisted. In many areas, as in North India (Punjab), hand-axes and choppers as well as chopping pebble tools existed side by side with flake tools. Here, however, the flake tools later on gained supremacy. In the Oldivai Gorge however the pebble tools gradually degenerated while the hand-axes evolved. The main question is, whether the hand-axe evolved from the pebble tools of the Oldowan type or whether they represent two distinct traditions, and whether the same people or two different peoples were responsible for the two cultures. Dr. Leakey knows his field best. Perhaps what Dr. Leakey has successfully shown is that the simple hand-axes (Stage 1) represents an evolutionary stage in advance over the tool types of Bed I (Oldowan). It would have been better if Dr. Leakey had gone into this question and related ones in greater detail. Whether the hand-axe idea was invented on the spot out of the Oldowan pebble tool or it was introduced here from outside, would remain an open question until further discoveries are made and when some of the anomalies which Dr. Leakey mentions are finally settled. It seems, however, clear that the main stages of the evolution of hand-axes (Chelleo-Acheulian) are represented in Beds II to IV, and the findings as recorded in the present book are consequently of great value.

D. Sen



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MAGIC (A Sociological Study)

By Hutton Webster, Ph.D., Stanford University Press, Stanford,  
California, Geoffrey Cumberlege : Oxford University  
Press, London, Price \$ 7.50 Pp. 539.

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Webster Hutton, a well-known sociologist, has recently contributed two outstanding works on 'Magic' and 'Taboo' about which very vague and mysterious ideas dominate the mind of literates and illiterates.

The role of magic is undoubtedly as wide as the life of man, and all things of the world come under its sway. It is, no doubt, a pseudo-science and the dependence on it still continues among the primitives and the so-called civilized. Magic is still unexplainable and mysterious. Therefore it is but natural that such an attempt after Frazer to make a scientific study of the whole subject of magic will be gratefully acknowledged by all students of sociology.

The book under review is divided into 17 chapters dealing with all the known aspects of magic, such as occult power, magic and animism, procedure and technique of magic, magical word, magical objects, magician, public and private magic, sorcery, imaginary sorcery, the belief in magic and the role of magic. It covers practically the whole field of magic.

From hoary antiquity, the unknown, unexplainable and the mysterious have always been explained by a particular reference to occult power. Magic recognizes the existence of this occult power which is used for individual and public ends. Both the primitives and the civilised use different terms to denote this occult power, of which the term *Mana* has been given universal recognition. The transmission of this occult power can be effected verbally or through objects. The procedure and the technique of magic originated, according to the author, from wishful thinking to verbal expressions which soon developed into set conventional forms. Magical words or spells which consist of every aspect of life are usually vague, mysterious and unexplainable. But its efficacy depends on the mode of uttering. Sometimes a magical act is a combination of both petition or prayer and spells. In this connection particular reference may be made to our *mantrams* which smell of prayer or petition but, at the same time, it will not be far beyond truth to contend that they originated and developed from primitive magical spells. Even today many *mantrams* uttered in our socio-religious rites and practices are a combination of both. Magical objects having occult power is a charm or medicine, the use of which is very

common amongst primitive tribes. Even in modern India this is a common practice, particularly in rural areas. The magicians have certain characteristics of their own. They are not priests, though sometimes the functions are combined; the magician depends on the occult power while the priest is primarily an agent of the people to communicate with the unseen and the unknown. In India both the functions are often combined in one person. A magician can inherit power or can be schooled or trained. He is the intelligentsia of the tribe; sometimes it is open to talents only and the profession is considered as the best career. Magical practices again may be public or private. Of all magical practices, black magic and sorcery are most feared.

In the last two chapters, the author deals with two important problems of magic—the belief in magic and the role of magic. "Magic has the sanction of a hoary antiquity" having the full support of tradition, and its efficacy is imposed on the primitives. Belief in magic is so firm that its failure is always explained as having been due to some mistake in procedure. The author, however, questions the efficacy of magical practices. He has cited several instances which prove that a "magician is, then, not a mere impostor, an arrant fraud". Such instances of constant deceit are numerous. Further, the author has pointedly referred to the fact that a magician never makes any attempt to perform the impossible—such as to cause rain in a dry season. He is, no doubt, a masterful personality but a "master of trickery and deceit".

The author thinks that magic must "rank amongst the greatest of man's delusions. It discourages intellectual acquisitiveness, nourish vain hopes and substitute the unreal for the real achievement in the natural world". Therefore he lays stress on the need of getting rid of magic altogether. He suggests various methods to be adopted for eliminating magic. According to him the most effective way of doing away with magic is through the impact of Western civilization. His other suggestions are, religious and moral teachings, instruction in elementary science, etc. He even thinks that the weapon of ridicule can be best employed to undermine the faith in the efficacy of magical rites. As to sorcery, he thinks, that mere prohibitory laws will not be very effective. The sorcerers are to be punished by banishment and confinement, and at the same time, elementary scientific instruction should be imparted explaining the real causes of disease, death and calamities.

The book, undoubtedly, presents a careful and painstaking survey of the whole subject of magic, explained and documented by constant

reference to primary sources. Notes added to each chapter have further enriched the book. They contain materials which are of great help for further study in the subject. It is, however, to be regretted that the author has not utilized Indian references to our satisfaction, more attention having been given to American and Far Eastern sources. The work is indeed full of materials, more than Frazer's works, showing the industry and scholarship of the author. The author has, however, avoided dealing in detail with the controversial question of the origin of magic and its particular relation with religion. The book, on the whole, has a general and academic interest, and the students of sociology will most gratefully utilize it as a text and reference book. The work deals with primitive magic only. It would be of great value and help if other works are produced dealing with the contributions of magic in the ancient civilized world, in medieval and modern periods. In this connection it may be noted that the study of the contributions of primitive magic in modern Indian socio-religious rites and practices would indeed open a new vista of sociological researches.

S. R. Das

### THE MAKING OF MODERN INDIA

(From A. D. 1526 to the present day)

By S. R. Sharma, M. A. Published by Orient Longmans Ltd, Price Rs. 11-8-0. PP 599.

This is the latest contribution of Mr. Sharma to the shelf of historical text books. The volume under review deals with the modern period of Indian history beginning from 1526 A. D. i. e. from the date of the conquest of Babur in the first battle of Panipat up to the present day. Opinions differ as to the date of the beginning of the modern period of Indian history. Mr. Sharma has, however, justified his starting point at 1526 by advancing certain arguments which are not beyond controversy. He says that the method followed is "analytical and topical rather than merely chronological and narrative". It may be reasonably feared that too much emphasis on "analytical and topical" in a text book may confuse the students. It is rather chronology that forms the back-bone of history. It can alone build a solid foundation for further historical study. It is, however, gratifying to note that Mr. Sharma, unlike many other text-book writers, has given more attention to the cultural attainments of the different periods. The general index and the notes added to each chapter are very helpful. There are also a few

illustrative maps. On the whole the book is well produced. The author's style is lucid and explanation clear. The book has been written in such a way as to cater to students as well as to general readers. It will serve the purpose of a very helpful text book for the B. A. pass and Honours students of our Universities.

S. R. Dās

### LAND AND SOCIETY IN MALABAR

*By Adrian C. Mayer, Oxford University Press 1952.*

In the preface Professor Raymond Firth writes, "Most of the books and articles about agrarian problems of India that reach the Western reader are analyses of a general kind. Mr. Mayer's book is not of this kind. It deals with a region and not a continent. It welds together treatment of economic and social phenomena."

Mr. Mayer deserves our congratulation for being the first among the anthropologists to make a regional survey of this type in India. In the introductory chapter he clearly indicates his period of stay in the field and admits that data were collected mainly from written records. The data have been presented in a very systematic and readable manner. He starts with a sketchy description of the geography and the historical background and then attempts to correlate the complicated caste structure and social system of the area with economic enterprises, laying particular emphasis on the types of land holdings and agriculture.

The author has not dealt with the aboriginal population living in the jungle tracts of Wynaad. In a regional study such omission is undesirable, for it leaves some useful comparative materials unutilized. The book would have been more informative if a *complete* list of the different occupational communities were given with their respective occupations and proportion in the total population.

In the concluding chapter the author has attempted to assess the effects of recent Government policies in Malabar with particular emphasis on "how the policies are received by the people and how much effect do they have on the lives of the Malayalis. He has touched upon rationing and procuring schemes, rural co-operatives, price control, prohibition, Temple Entry Act and communist movements. He is under the impression—"the lack of feeling of responsibility for policies and for those who make them, have meant that few of the Government policies are working really satisfactorily".

Mr. Mayer's book should be a source of inspiration for Indian students to complete the primary regional surveys of different parts of India. This is the essential pre-requisite for intensive study of specific coherent problems. The different research institutions in India should co-operate to set up a joint scheme in this direction.

Surajit Chandra Sinha

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NOTES AND QUERIES ON ANTHROPOLOGY—Sixth Edition.

*Revised and rewritten by "A Committee of the Royal Anthropological Institution of Great Britain and Ireland".*

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We welcome the long-awaited publication of the sixth edition of Notes and Queries on Anthropology, under the Chairmanship of Professor H. J. Fleure. The fifth edition was published in 1929. The last two decades have watched the growth of the Science of Anthropology from infancy to adolescence—the main directions of this development being :

1. Anthropology has gone a long way towards becoming a general science of human activities outgrowing the stamp of specialization in studying primitive human societies only.

2. Increasing application of the methods of experimental psychology and statistics.

3. Emphasis on functional interrelation of different institutions in a community and interest in studying different types of culture contact situations. There are indications of these developments in the present volume. In page 38, we find : "Modern Social Anthropology lays particular stress on the interdependence of the different aspects of social life in a given society." Again, in the chapter on Method, we find that the statistical problem of getting a representative sample has been discussed (pp. 56-57).

The editorial committee have chosen to lay down methods mainly concerning non-literate folk, for, if the special problems involved in studying advanced industrial communities be included within the scope of the present volume, it would become too bulky and cumbersome to be termed a handbook. Like the last edition, the present volume is mainly concerned with Cultural Anthropology and the old structure of reference for enquiries on different items has been maintained without much alteration.

The principles of blood-grouping in the section on Physical Anthropology and the extensive bibliography at the end are very useful additions in this edition.

Before we conclude, the reviewer ventures, with some hesitation, to indicate some points whose inclusion might have been useful :

1. More clarification is necessary about the selection of the basic unit of observation for studying a community ; whether this should be a territorial unit like the village or a kinship or similar group like family or clan. The village is often found to be a very useful starting point for an integrated study of society—but the problems involved in selecting a sample village (geographical situation, distribution of different communities, size of the settlement etc.) for studying homogenous as well as changing societies require adequate elucidation.

2. In the introductory chapter, the specific role of Cultural Anthropology in studying human society as distinct from allied disciplines (Pure Sociology, Psychology, Economics etc.) should be clearly indicated. This will substantially clarify the attitude of the field-worker from the beginning and more so as he makes some progress in the collection of data.

This very valuable book, decidedly the best available field-guide in Anthropology, should be an essential companion of any serious student of society and culture.

S. C. Sinha

### ANTHROPOLOGY: The Study of Man

By S.C. Dube, M.A., Ph.D., Osmania University, Hyderabad.

Pp. vi+173. Chetana, Hyderabad (1952) Rs 6/8/-

The title of this little volume is rather pretentious; and the author seems to be aware of this, for he has written in the preface that the book attempts nothing very ambitious and is intended for the general reader and the university student. Both these terms, being classificatory, are vague. If this book is recommended as a text for M.A., or even Honours students, we would be guilty of abetting in the lowering of standards. It is, however, certainly a readable as also a digestible introduction to the subject; and will serve well the purpose of the general *lay* reader or the undergraduate who may want to get acquainted with anthropology before embarking upon a more serious study of the subject.

The author has attempted an as-simple-as-possible presentation

of some anthropological topics. But he has, quite often, sacrificed clarity for the sake of simplicity and precision. For instance, he does not make quite clear as to how exactly prehistoric cultural reconstruction takes place on the basis of geological evidence. "Prognathism" on p 26 is unexplained. On p. 55 he writes about the Garos and says that "after the death of his maternal uncle, a person is under the obligation to marry his mother-in-law (maternal uncle's wife) whose daughter he has already married. Among both these groups monogamy is the general rule". No comment is needed to indicate the contradiction involved in this statement.

On p. 110 there is a reference to the Golden Stool of the Ashanti, which is too cryptic for the unacquainted for whom the book is meant.

The glossary at the end is far from complete, while the absence of an index is a positive drawback. The illustrations are not all as accurate as they ought to be.

The publishers have done well in managing to put down printing errors to the minimum, which are almost negligible. The get-up also is quite good.

T. N. Madan

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### EVOLUTION IN OUTLINE

*By Prof. T. Neville George, Professor of Geology,  
University of Glasgow.*

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This is the first book to appear in the series Thrift Books and promises very well to keep up the standard attained by the Publishers, C. A. Watts & Co, London, in their *Thinker's Library* series of books. Within the short compass of 125 pages the author gives a clear outline indeed of the natural process of evolution as it appears to be taking place, in the light of up-to-date scientific research. In ordinary school and popular books on the subject either an over-simplified or a biased account is found and the general reader, unless he takes special care, cannot avoid having a confused idea on the factors of evolution and their respective roles in the entire process. Since the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859 very important discoveries have been made, particularly on the nuclear structure and behaviour of reproductive cells which have, to some extent, clarified our ideas on Heredity and Variation; but still controversies are going on between the Neo-Lamarckians and the Neo-Darwinians as to the heritability of acquired characters. The author himself appears to be on the side of the latter and has dismissed the

Lysenko-Michurin extremism with the remark, 'The doctrine of the Russian Michurin-Lysenko school that nature is of supreme importance in Evolution is based on inadequately reported experimental evidence, the value of which cannot at present be assessed'. The author is opposed to the importation of all vitalist theories in this field and thinks it wrong to adhere to the notions of purpose and progress behind the process of evolution. He has given brief but clear accounts of human evolution, extinction of animals, geological and geographical distribution, statistical results of natural selection, barriers and several other important aspects of evolution with masterly brevity and precision. He has succeeded very well in impressing in the mind of his reader the fact that "Sweeping generalizations are ceasing to be acceptable as summaries of evolutionary theory; and the problems of evolution become more intricate the greater the detail in which they are studied." Students of Biology in the Indian Universities, particularly those who have taken up Honours or are appearing in the M. Sc. examination, will find this book, priced at one shilling, to be helpful and good reading, while the junior student also, if he is acquainted with the simple technical terms used in the book, will be benefited. There is a glossary at the end of the book which will help him much.

A. S. Khan

### ANCIENT HISTORY

From Prehistoric times to the Death of Justinian

*By Charles Alexander Robinson, Jr. Professor of Classics, Brown University, Published by the MacMillan Company, New York.*

*Price 6-0-0 pp 738.*

The title of the book under review "*Ancient History*" is rather amissomer for the author deals with the story of Western man from his earliest beginnings to Justinian's death in 565 A. D. The author does not take into account the events of the Oriental world and how they have influenced the cultural development of the West.

The author's style is simple and lucid.

The book is replete with numerous maps and diagrams, all neatly and carefully drawn.

L. K. Ray



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### PRACHIN BANGLA SAHITYER ITIHAS (Bengali)

By Dr. Tamas Chandra Das Gupta, M. A., Ph. D. (Calcutta University Publication) PP. 763, Price Rs. 12/-.

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It was the late Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen who started an intensive research in the highly interesting subject, the *History of Bengali Literature*. Since then many scholars have followed him and we have some well-written books on the subject. The book under review is one more valuable addition.

The book is the result of assiduous study and embodies almost all the valuable materials hitherto published and unpublished. It is indeed a creditable performance. In Bengali as elsewhere literary creations in a particular period are the result of interaction of many forces, of environment and the distinctive talents of the authors. The author has kept this historical method in mind, and his criticisms are based from this point of view. This method is of great value, not only for students of literature but also for students of History and Sociology.

Instead of rendering a chronological treatment of the subject he has set forth literary types and dealt with them separately.

L. K. Ray

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### OUR GROWING HUMAN FAMILY

From Tribe to World Federation.

By Minoo Masani; Illustrated by C. H. G. Moorhouse, Published

By Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press,

Madras, P. 116. Price Rs. 5-0-0.

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Minoo Masani, the author of *Our India* needs no introduction. The book under review is a laudable attempt to tell the story in a simple way of man's constant and never-ending struggle to live in amity with his neighbours. The first chapter deals with the question whether man can live alone or not. The second chapter deals with the meaning of the term "survival of the fittest". The test of "fitness to survive" according to the author is "neither strength nor fitness but mainly.....the capacity of particular kinds of animals to combine.....for the welfare of the species" (p. 9.) "The outstanding characteristic of the tribe as an institution" says the author, "is in the identification of the individual with the tribe, and each for all is the golden rule, of society. The head-line of the fourth chapter is 'A wife's a son and a slave'. This chapter deals with the formation of

family in society necessitated mainly by the invention of agriculture. Incidentally, the author describes the different kinds of marriages performed in different countries of the East, viz. China, Japan and India. This agricultural revolution gave birth, according to the author, social institutions such as the Village Community and then he describes *samiti* and folk moot. In the fifth chapter, he gives a comparative study of institutions of a similar nature from India and Europe. The author quotes the Atharva Veda but he fails to note the ideal mentioned in the famous hymns of Rigveda X. 191 2-4 "Same be your intention, same may be your hearts; same may your minds be so that there may be complete unison amongst you" (Tr. Dr. V. Raghavan). The author wants mankind to remember the ideal laid before us by the poet Rabindra Nath Tagore: "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; where knowledge is free,.....".

The book is not only instructive and interesting for young boys, but will also be appreciated by the general reader.

L K. Ray

### HINDU VIEW OF CHRIST

By Swami Akhilananda, Ramkrishna Vedanta Society, Introduction  
by Dr. Welter G. Muelder, Dean, Boston University, School  
of Theology. Published by Philosophical Library,  
New York. Pp. 289, Price \$ 3-00.

The main purpose of this presentation, says the author, is to establish harmony and understanding among religious groups and to show the *common background* of the various religious ideals imparted by the founders of the different religious groups. Hindu scriptures teach universality of religions. But this universality was overshadowed and it was Sri Ramakrishna who actually demonstrated the full value of this idea not only to peoples of India but, we may confidently say, to the world.

Swami Akhilananda, a disciple of Swami Brahmananda of the Ramakrishna Mission, delivered several lectures at Boston and Providence in the U. S. A, which are incorporated in the book under review. It is a study of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ from the Hindu standpoint and very properly styled as the *Hindu view of Christ*. The author, a religious teacher, moulded by the teachings of the great saint, has taken up the subject and we have now a comprehensive

study of the life and teachings of Lord Jesus as can easily be understood by a Hindu.

To a Hindu, be he a philosopher or a layman, the first question that comes to his mind "is Jesus Christ an incarnation". From the Hindu point of view, says the author, "He was fully conscious of his mission as an incarnation and clearly understood the object of His life and the method that He and His followers must use, whether or not the world accepted His message at that time. He knew that it was bound to be accepted eventually".

There was no faltering in his consciousness. He definitely expressed the ideal and left the world *cheerfully* like a hero ".....divine—incarnations come to fulfil the crying need of the age" (pp. 15-16).

The author has very ably answered the charge that has been laid against Him, the charge that Jesus was a paranoiac and had other symptoms of mental disorder. "It is our contention" says Swamiji "..... Their behaviour is *beyond and above all normality* that we can conceive. They are really supernormal beings. In fact they can transform." (pp. 18-19). In concluding the chapter dealing with Christ, an incarnation, the author's opinion is, "The Hindu will agree with the orthodox in regarding Christ as unique in comparison with ordinary man; yet he will differ in holding that there have been and will be numerous incarnations of God .. The Hindu accepts many special revelations and special manifestations in the form of divine incarnation".

In the Srimad Bhagavad Gita, VI, 15 and 27 we find, "The supreme bliss comes to that Yogi of perfectly tranquil mind, with passion quieted., Brahman-become and freed from taint". Swami Vivekananda says, "Yoga is the science of restraining the mind from breaking into modifications". In the Bhagavata (SK. 10) we read, divine incarnations love all persons irrespective of their position, power, or qualities. The author concludes the third chapter after mentioning the Hindu ideas of four kinds of Yoga, Bhakti Yoga (the path of love) Karma Yoga (the path unselfish action), Jnana Yoga (the path of knowledge) and Raja Yoga (realization of God, the objective of other paths) and says "devotion, unselfish work, meditation, and knowledge culminated in Him as they have culminated in other incarnations". He further states that Jesus as an incarnation did not need to learn Yoga from any one as he was a born teacher. the fourth chapter of the book deals with Christ and spiritual practices. The questions "Christ and every day problems" and "Christ as power" are discussed in Chapter V and VI.

"It is true, however", says Swamijee, that social scientists are trying to establish better social relationship but "they are bound to fail when they ignore the basis of co-operation and co-ordination namely love and divine realisation, as expounded by Jesus and other great world teachers" (pp 143, 144). Indeed we have become ego-centric and individualistic, the common cause of all evils. Incidentally the author criticizes the view of Prof. Reinhold Niebhur expounded in his book *Christianity and Power Politics* and styles it as a philosophy of defeatists, incompetent to follow the teachings of Christ and wanting to justify the new religious tendencies in terms of Christian ideology.

L. K. Ray

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### THE QUINTESENCE OF HINDUISM

By H. O. Mascarenhs, M.A., Ph.D., D. D. Published by  
Rev. Bento D'Souza, St. Sabartian Goan High School,  
Burronwas lane, Thakurdwar, Bombay 2.

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This little volume under review comes from the pen of a learned theologian and is an attempt to find out the metaphysical parts of Indian culture.

In the first part the author points out "The Hindu is primarily concerned with the invisible things of God, however much he seem to be completely engrossed with the business of the world. He has been given a technique in the Bhagavad Gita by which he can do the one without losing sight of the other" "The mystical paths of the via purgativa (Karma marga), the via illuminativa (Jnana marga) and via unitiva (Bhakti marga) have an irresistible attraction for him .... He can by God's grace achieve perfect peace with God within his own conscience by perfect contribution (purna-paschattap) since conversion of the heart to God (prayaschitta) and wholesale surrender of his will to God, (prapatti) in complete selfless dedication (atma nivedana)" (pages 30-31) "Religion for the Hindu", says the learned author, "is constituted and defined by man's relation to God and God alone. No one can intervene between man and God, except of course God Himself or God's Real Representative" (p. 38).

After analysing the metaphysical question of *Abhaba* (Nothing), *Anantatva* (Infinity), *Moksha* (Absolute Freedom) and *Advaita* (Transcendence) the author proceeds with the discussion of problem of *Brahma Dristi* (The Divine outlook) and *Advaita* as *Transcendence*. In the appendix the author has added the paper "Religio-cultural problems

of India "read at the Silver Jubilee Session of the Indian Philosophical Congress in Calcutta on 22nd—24th December, 1950". Mahatma Gandhi is quoted as saying "In India, we have known denial of God but not the denial of Truth and have therefore preferred to adopt Truth as our name for God.....The Upanishadic confidence in the victory of truth over falsehood has furnished us with the text for our national motto : *Satyam eva jayate*". The author further adds "without hurting anybody's religious susceptibilities, we can have in the cultivation of a *comparative study of religious tradition* (and of all that they imply) not only as a means of clarifying the meaning of religion, but as a scientific instrument at our disposal for vitalising our own particular religious tradition, by enriching it in its human values and liberating it from the darkness of ignorance and perversity'.

The book is a clear, learned and critical exposition of Hinduism which is the most searching quest in the natural order of the divine that the world has known. It is a valuable addition to a study of comparative religion.

L. K. Ray